



# AMONG OTHERS

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*Author of*

THE TESTAMENT OF DOMINIC BURLEIGH, ETC.



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*To*  
*Some of the Others*

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
CAUTIONARY	5
CHAP. I. <i>Fir Trees</i>	9
CHAP. II. <i>Arnold Tradition</i>	34
CHAP. III. <i>Herd Instinct</i>	73
CHAP. IV. <i>Epilogue to Education</i>	89
CHAP. V. <i>Bullets and Hunger</i>	114
CHAP. VI. <i>Anabasis</i>	132
CHAP. VII. <i>Outside the World</i>	146
CHAP. VIII. <i>Before the Plunge</i>	156
CHAP. IX. <i>In the Stream</i>	176
CHAP. X. <i>Devastated Area</i>	228
CHAP. XI. <i>Crash</i>	258
CHAP. XII. <i>Orthodoxies</i>	273

## CAUTIONARY

SOME months ago I told the youngest member of my family, aged a little over seven, that I was proposing to write a book which had a good deal to do with my past life, and I asked what he thought it should be called. Unlike most authors, he found no difficulty whatever in thinking of titles. It was soon obvious, in fact, that he was an inexhaustible mine of titles.

*I never could resist it.*

*Me and my Mischief.*

*I'm really cleverer than you think.*

*Poor Old Me.*

These, I think, are all very attractive suggestions. They only go to show, what I have always maintained, that extreme youth is far from a disqualification for executing striking works of art in the modern manner. A pastel drawing by the author of these suggestions at the age of five has indeed more than once been admired as a mature masterpiece of modernism. Of these four titles at any rate, each would do admirably for a whole category of modern autobiography. The third indeed is something like a stroke of genius. Only it wasn't exactly that sort of book that I was trying to write.

After this I was offered *Me and Politics*—how well one knows that work too! And, perhaps most

cautionary of all, *Ordinary History of My Life*. That at least I was resolved not to write. The thing might be Ordinary, but a History of my Life, that, if I could help it, it should *not* be.

Now, however, that it is finished, I see that there is a real danger that it is precisely as a *History of my Life* that this insignificant volume may be regarded by those who may chance to borrow it. Here then is my earnest, my probably ineffectual, warning that this AMONG how many! OTHERS (for I have reluctantly preferred a less ambitious title of my own) is not intended to be an autobiography. Who am I that I should write the History of my Life? And if such a History this were, how much which is omitted, it would have had to include. For parts of this book, I am afraid, are combative, even pugnacious. And controversy is not what I care for most. The things which I care for are more domestic, more private and more human than controversy. A familiar face by the fireside, the voice of a child in the garden, the sighing of the wind in the trees of home.

But this story moves among others. And among others, it seems to me, or rather among such select others as use their pens much, there flourish just now so many feeble but fashionable falsehoods that it is difficult and indeed faint-hearted not occasionally to be combative. But how easily, I sometimes can't help reflecting, I might have been swimming now with the intellectual current! If my nursery days had not been in, and of, the nineties; had it not been for the war, for that Gloucestershire constituency and my experiences of broadcasting, had

I not in all these different ways come into most intimate contact with common humanity in the mass, it is probable that this might have been a clever book, faithful to all the most priggish conventions of the moment. I might have taken the intellectuals seriously, and, like them, been irretrievably sundered from humanity. But at least, I trust, it is not an *Ordinary History of my Life*.

# I

## FIR TREES

WE leaned back in the car wearily but with a sense of luxury. Certainly the Abbey service had been memorable. It had been both curious and pleasant to feel oneself living simultaneously in the twentieth century and in the Middle Ages. Of course there had been that extraordinary chaos afterwards. The slow jostle of ermine and velvet through that canvas passage to the House of Lords, in the course of which we had run into Julian Huxley, looking distinguished but faintly improbable in his court suit. Waiting for one's car for three and a half hours too, with nowhere to sit down and all the while getting steadily damper. And once I had dropped my unfamiliar coronet in the gutter and an elderly peer ejaculated meaningly, "1789!"

We leaned back in the car wearily but with a sense of luxury. It was all over. The Middle Ages and the twentieth century had met. And suddenly, for no particular reason, I thought of the world into which I was born, much remoter surely now than the Middle Ages. That raw red village in the Berkshire firwoods from which one adventured to Reading, ten miles away, half a dozen times a year at most, by rail. And that, since we were on a branch of the old South Eastern, took a good two hours. The roads, heavy with white dust in summer, as yet

unstirred by a petrol-driven vehicle. The red brick villa in the apple orchard. No aeroplanes droning over the sunny heathlands. A small, isolated, frugal world, only forty years away, yet how incredibly remote! More remote, one felt just now, than the Middle Ages.

If this were a ruthless modern story I should no doubt picture every other home, in that remote, irrecoverable England of the late nineties, as a private lunatic asylum, with a stern hypocritical Victorian paterfamilias forcing his own repressions on his cowering offspring. Alas! even if I wished to, the portraits of the placid parsons and country gentlemen on my walls would not allow me to follow the fashion. Nervous breakdowns had not been invented then. These ladies and gentlemen were sure of themselves. They had a code.

When I was a boy Progress had not yet invaded the nursery, or for that matter the school-room. My parents had read no text-books on the Psychology of Parenthood. Strange as it now seems, it almost certainly never even occurred to them that they would be well advised to read text-books on how to bring up their children. If I had been born twenty years later my parents might have been touched by the spirit of Progress and might have learned how to manage their nursery from the works of uncouth, childless professors and tight-lipped female dons. How exactly under those circumstances they would have brought me up it is impossible to say, for, as everybody knows, there are half a dozen different scientific methods of bringing up children nowadays,

and, though they are mostly mutually contradictory, they are all equally progressive. But to my parents, who can scarcely have heard of the existence of any theories about children, it certainly never occurred that there could be rival theories, and they brought me up by tradition and the light of nature.

It was largely thanks to tradition, no doubt, that there were family prayers every morning, and that, as soon as I was old enough, I had to learn the Collect for the day and a piece of the Catechism every Sunday, and that we all went to the red-brick church each Sunday morning. Perhaps with the oil lamps lit on a winter evening the raw red church might have softened into mystery, but we did not go to church in the evening. In early days my mother took me to the children's service in the afternoon as well, at which Mr. Coleridge, who was six foot seven and broad in proportion (and whose brother was said to have carried off two captured Boers, one under each arm, in the South African War) walked up and down the centre aisle and asked the village children questions about what they had learnt in Sunday school, with a gleam of gold-stopped teeth as he smiled. (Village children, need I add, did not mean children who lived in the village, in which sense I was undoubtedly a village child myself, but children whose parents earned wages and not salaries.) Here too, there was no thrill, though once a goat strayed up the aisle to join the vicar's perambulations and the congregation began to giggle. "There is nothing to laugh at," he said genially. "Goats were a common sight in the Hebrew synagogues." At which the goat respectfully withdrew. Nor was there anything that

I can truthfully call a thrill about being confirmed at Rugby. The preparation by my house master, though he was the greatest teacher of his generation, had been awe-inspiring rather than exciting. The climax was the personal interview with the head master. Lennox Napier, my study companion, had been confirmed the year before and gave me a tip. "I asked him what is the use of prayer if God always does what is best for you, anyhow," he said. "He was frightfully bucked." And so when Dr. James asked if I had any doubts or difficulties I was ready with my question, "What is the use of prayer, sir, if God does what is best for you, anyhow?" He replied at some length, and I did not understand a word of what he said. But it was obvious that I had scored. My report that term was not particularly good, but the head master wrote, "I could see that he *thought* over his confirmation."

Then one winter's evening in my first year at Balliol the chapel bell sounded poignantly like the bell of the red-brick church at Crowthorne, and suddenly my childhood was all about me again. Hardly knowing why, I seized my gown and hurried across the rainy quad. It was a week day and I found that the only other person in chapel was Neville Talbot, who was taking the service. I was the entire congregation. The responses would depend upon me alone, and as the lighting was extremely dim I should probably have to do some improvisation. I was a trifle shaky—was it "Bless thine inheritance," for example, or "Bless thine heritage?"—but on the whole I got through with credit. It was 1912 and with the brilliant mid-Victorian rationalism of

Balliol invisibly but all-pervasively about us there was a curious and stimulating effect of a meeting of persecuted Early Christians in a catacomb.\* And so my parents, if they had known it, had their reward. Thanks to those unecstatic hours in the red-brick church of Crowthorne, the ancient ritual had unexpectedly come to mean my childhood to me and my mind had begun to root itself in the oldest of civilised traditions. It was Alfred Ollivant, for example, who was saying, "Of course I soon found that all the stuff one learns at one's mother's knee won't do." Now Ollivant was an author and for that reason alone (I was eighteen) I admired him enormously. *Owd Bob* was the only work of his I had read then, or indeed have read since; but he was a live author and I was walking with him by night. When years later I went to see Thomas Hardy at Max Gate for the first time I was no readier to admire and assent. There was almost nothing Ollivant could have said with which I would not have instantly and passionately agreed. But this particular observation struck a faint chill into me. I racked my brain for an appropriate reply, but torn between my unconscious loyalties and my profound respect for a writer I was reduced to an oafish silence.

My nurse was nearly seventy when she came to us. She wore a black widow's mantle and a black widow's bonnet was tied under her chin with ribbons. Her face was brown and wrinkled, with sad, patient blue eyes. Her years with us, she used to say, were the happiest of her life. She normally

addressed me as "ducky," and during the whole of her time with us she refused to sleep a night away from me. She could read a little, but could not write. I remember almost nothing now that I learned from her, except that I learned much. She was full of proverbial sayings and omens and queer lore. Everything, she said, was created for some useful purpose. On this theory I constantly tried to stump her, but without success. Bluebottles were here to feed birds, she said, fleas were good for dogs, and even dust, the dust which rose in slow white clouds whenever a tradesman's cart rattled up the lane, was useful for something or other, I can't now remember what. She used to pore over Old Moore's Almanac and shake her head over the prophetic cuts of skeletons waving red flags before oncoming express trains, and the masts of sinking ships protruding gauntly from raging seas. I went in great awe of Old Moore myself. After the outbreak of the Great War I came upon an issue of his prophetic booklet for 1914 and found no reference to any disturbance of the peace of Europe. But even now I have not wholly shed my awe.

When Nurse Lambden had no work to do for the moment she did not fuss or flutter or pick up a novel. She would sit quite still with hands folded in her lap. Children in Shakespeare's day must have had such nurses. Besides utter devotion she gave me the inestimable advantage of intimate contact with an untutored, and therefore an unspoiled, mind, drawing direct upon the lore of generations of the simple. It must have been from her that unknowingly I first learned that instinct is a surer guide than reason,

and that the saints are wiser than the philosophers.

There are no Elizabeth Lambdens to be procured as children's nurses nowadays, I find. Their place has been taken by superior young persons who have been trained at Nursery Colleges, whose testimonials invariably assert that they are well versed in the principles of a Dr. Truby King, and for whom their youthful charge is not ducky but a profession. . . . Nurse Lambden in her black bonnet and mantle, with her sad blue eyes and wrinkled cheeks, tightly grasping a small boy by the hand as they wander together, very slowly, through the fir-woods! Only for six years did our lives closely encounter, yet how much each of us has meant to the other. Nurse Lambden, drinking her endless cups of tea; gossiping with Miss Brooks, the Forster's cook; sitting, with hands folded, gazing into the fire, while outside the fir-woods, in all their mysterious aloofness, settle down for the night.

Did our elders, I often wonder, unnecessarily shield us, as do all Victorian parents in fiction, from what it is now, for some reason, customary to call the facts of life? Conceivably they did. Every generation has its inhibitions and this, it may be, was theirs. Not that I seem to discern in retrospect any distressing lacunae in my own education; faintly comic perhaps, but hardly distressing. I remember that when the time came to warn me against the moral pitfalls of a public school my father put a pamphlet into my hand and told me to go into the drawing-room and read it. "When you have finished, come into the study and tell me." I

could see that he was embarrassed and began to feel slightly uncomfortable myself. The pamphlet, as I studied it, did not seem to me shocking or even exciting. It was faintly disagreeable, but that was all. Feeling slightly self-conscious, I went into my father's study. "Have you read it?" he asked. I said that I had. "Did you understand it?" Perhaps not altogether truthfully, I said, Yes, I had understood it. "Are you sure?" There was no mistaking the relief in his voice. Perhaps after all this allusive method of warning the young had its merits. In some ways, I suppose, it was not more comic than our own preference for tactful chats, at the earliest possible opportunity, on the reproductive organs of plants and animals—which led an up-to-date urchin to shrill audibly, during a solemn hush at his sister's wedding, "When is Mr. Johnson going to put the pollen on Gladys?" Much the same methods, it seems to me in retrospect, must have been in vogue at my preparatory school. Mr. Christopher-son certainly warned us against—I simply can't remember what he called it. But I can remember him telling us that in years gone by, before his day, the school had been in a bad way and a parent visiting it had noticed the boys hanging about, whispering together, in small groups. I don't think I had any precise idea as to what he was warning us against, save that it was something evil; and evil, I gathered, involved whispering together in small groups. Nothing happened at Lockers Park to enlighten me further. There were two boys—I fancy they left earlyish—to whom there clung a faintly equivocal reputation. It must, I imagine, at

some time have been reduced to words but I cannot imagine in what terms, and I am sure that I at any rate had not the faintest notion of what delinquencies, if any, they were suspected. All the same there was discernible round one of them an impalpable barrier. Not unattractive in a pale, silent way, nevertheless he made one feel mysteriously uncomfortable. Was this, then, evil? Both these boys slept in the same dormitory: there was a thoroughfare through it to the private side of the house and, presumably for this reason, it traditionally housed the turbulent characters. Years after I had left I stayed a night with the Christophersons and was taken by this route to visit the senior master after the school had gone to bed. The cherubic faces of the slumberers were visible in the light of the passage lamp and with a slight shock I realised that these must be the bad characters of the day.

Every generation has its own inhibitions. The late Victorians thought it improper to talk about sex. We think it improper to talk about God or incomes, both of which, I should say, are more interesting subjects. There was a time when my wife and I even had some hesitations about saying anything to our own children about death. Quite unnecessarily of course. In so many ways children are more sensible than their elders, and they are certainly not in the least perturbed by death. Why should they be? For practical purposes they are immortal, since they are scarcely aware that they will die. And death, if it has no sting, becomes merely boring. I used to be vaguely surprised at the

queer, gloating interest with which Nurse Lambden (who knew all about death's sting) would watch a funeral in the little churchyard opposite our nursery windows. "There, he's using his handkerchief now," she would mutter, fascinated. I peered at the mourners—I can still see how they were grouped about the open grave—and wondered why it was all so exciting. It was no good: I could not tell. It seemed profoundly uninteresting to me. I ought to have remembered all that, when years afterwards we were driving past a cemetery in which a flower-heaped coffin was being borne gravewards and a small daughter inquired, "What is that trunkish thing with fl'ers?" Instead of which we put her off with dexterous evasions. Not long afterwards we found her and her younger sister deep in an elaborate game of Funerals with Malcolm MacDonald, fresh from an Imperial Conference. Audrey was sustaining, with startling verisimilitude, the role of the corpse. She was lying on the library floor, wrapped from head to foot in her shroud, a dust sheet, with Rosemary excitedly calling, "Where's the pennies to put on her eyes?" Then with solemn chanting the motionless white bundle was borne by Malcolm into my study and carefully lowered into the bottom drawer of a talboys. The drawer was shut on it. Rosemary danced with excitement. "Now she's in her grave," she shrilled. "I'll be the worms, I'll be the worms!" After this we didn't bother so much about shielding our children from the thought of death.

In my childhood too, you may say, there were inhibitions about words. It was not till after I had

reached man's estate that Bernard Shaw ensured the success of a play by getting an actress to say "bloody" on the stage. And to this day the use of that particular word in the theatre is greeted by London audiences with storms of delighted laughter. I do not find the word so stimulating myself, whether on the stage or off it; but then after you have lived night and day for a month or so in a small slit in the ground cheek by jowl with the British working classes the novelty of that particular combination of letters is apt to wear off and you begin to suspect that "language" is never "bad" nor "strong," but only monotonous. Just now, however, the word "bloody" enjoys all the advantages of transitional status. It may be used in polite society, yet it is still mildly shocking. An Oxford don went one day to fetch his small son, a day boy at a local preparatory school. As he waited, he encountered a classmate of the boy's and, by way of making himself agreeable, inquired what he had been learning that morning. "About Bloody Mary," said the child. Being an historian himself the don suspected tendentious teaching on the Counter-Reformation, and as he walked home with his son, inquired, "And what do *you* think of Bloody Mary, as I hear you call her?" The child seemed surprised. "Which do you mean, daddy?" he said, "Miss Postlethwaite or Miss Simpkinson?"

Crowthorne, the red brick Berkshire village in which, when I was a boy, we lived opposite the red-brick church, had come into existence in the second half of last century, parasitic upon Wellington

College, the red-brick pile in Victorian baroque which the Prince Consort and the Lord Derby of that day had planted on Bagshot Heath in 1856, and parasitic too, to a lesser degree, upon the red-brick criminal lunatic asylum of Broadmoor, a mile or two away across the firs. But village, school and asylum seemed but transient intruders upon those ancient heathlands. For thousands of years the lonely heath had stretched, unscarred by a single human dwelling, scarcely changing from century to century. No one lived here until there was steam to bring food from far afield, for these were not lands to till. Through unnumbered ages this was hunting ground. Hunters of the flint age flung their spears here, and overshooting their mark, left them to lie two or three thousand years in the heather until Professor Jones picked them up and presented them to the College Museum. Britons cut the Devil's Highway across the heather north of what is now the village and Romans raised the road and drained it, for it led to Silchester. Set out along the Devil's Highway towards Bagshot and to this day, though you are not much more than thirty miles from the heart of London, you may walk five miles without setting eye on man or dwelling. Most of the Kings of England chased the stag in these parts. In a map of 1607 Crowthorne was the name of a solitary tree which marked the boundary of four forest walks. Gradually through this measureless extent of time these desolate lands acquired a sombre spirit of their own, wholly indifferent to man. There are countrysides—almost all the Home Counties, for example, in which

these heaths are so incongruously set—whose souls man has long since impregnated with his own. Walk out of Oxford or Winchester and you might be in an extension of your own garden. The fields have been tilled for centuries. They are heavy with human history. They have been so long subdued that they have all but lost their own souls. They are like valuable slaves, sleek and tame and unadventurous. But the Berkshire heaths have survived unmastered since ancient heathendom. The murmur which never quite leaves their fir-tops remembers dark, forgotten things. It was in these eerie woods that Lord Derby and the Prince Consort decided, after long hesitation, to build the school which was to be a national memorial to the Iron Duke. And ever since then the red brick villas of Crowthorne have been creeping out across the heath. But they have not tamed it. It is more alive as well as more permanent than they. A few hundred years are but a moment in the life of the heath, and in a few hundred years fir and heather will in all probability have swallowed the villas up again. One could slip out of the village and into the woods in a couple of minutes then, and as soon as one had taken a few paces into the twilights of the fir-aisles one was in another country and the stroke of the quarters on the village clock pursued one, faint and impotent as the church bells which the forsaken merman heard from his ocean caverns. By itself, Crowthorne might have been a mere training in fashionable materialism. Not so the heath.

Sometimes when you played hide-and-seek as a child, you crouched, motionless and listening. A

child is so seldom silent and still, that the sudden intent hush came as a revelation. And occasionally on a summer afternoon when I was a boy I used to practise the same trick of sudden listening stillness, even when there was no hide-and-seek. You sat wholly still, listening, in the shabby old arm-chair in the dining-room when no one else was there. At first you heard the tick of the dining-room clock, and the murmur of insects in the sunlight outside, and a cock crowing far away. And then for an instant the summer afternoon stood still and you heard, or *felt*, something behind and beyond all these. For a moment the material world had flickered. . . . For some reason I often think of those moments, in which time seemed mysteriously and revealingly to stand still, as I recall against the background of the ancient heath some one or other of the highly-coloured glimpses of the past which fill my head. An August sun baking down on the red-brick village street and the tarred fences and on the lavender and Madonna lilies in the little garden and on the firs beyond, as a small boy in a blue jersey and knickerbockers trudges up the dusty hill. A chance scent or a sudden trick of sunlight—and instantaneously you *are* that small boy again and you smell the dust and the firs, and the sun of that remote August is hot on your cheek again, the *same* cheek. These are the real memories. The past which you consciously remember is not the past, for you have thought the present into it. The sudden unguarded flash into an older life lights up the world as it once was; and for a moment you recapture the lost piercing senses of childhood. When

you come nearest to truth in later life you come nearest to your childhood. For all but the greatest artists and the greatest saints childhood is the beginning of a life which is never lived, a lost experience of reality. And so if I am told that my present inhibitions are the prejudices of my childhood, I do not really mind. I only wish I had more of them.

Physically we were certainly prodigiously isolated from the world. It needs something of an effort now to realise our isolation. Crowthorne, for example, is only thirty odd miles from London, and theoretically there were half a dozen different ways of getting to London by train. But if you were travelling with luggage most of them meant driving in a horse carriage. And I doubt if three families in Crowthorne kept horses. My own father's days of comparative affluence, after he had inherited an estate in Hampshire, complete with village, troutstream and picturesquely decrepit mill, came in the early days of the motor-car. And meanwhile to hire a cab to drive to Wokingham or Camberley or Blackwater would have been an inconceivable extravagance. Inconceivable in the strict sense that it would never have occurred to us, or to any of our neighbours. There remained accordingly Crowthorne Station—or Wellington College for Crowthorne as, more respectfully to the Prince Consort, it was then called. And this was on a branch of the old South-Eastern. The up trains, it is true, did eventually reach London—with inexplicable meanderings and in about two and a

half hours. Indeed I was always despatched by this route myself to my preparatory school, and Blackwater, Farnbrough, Ash for Aldershot were successive boulders plunging sullenly into the well of my despair, during the almost intolerable agonies of the thrice-yearly departure, or were rapturously greeted outposts of the promised land during the ecstasy of the thrice-yearly return. But two and a half hours to London, stopping at every station! Even for the early nineteen hundreds it was a bit too slow. The only alternative was to travel into Reading on the South-Eastern and change there on to the Great Western. But how long might you not have to wait on Crowthorne platform for your down train to Reading! You would wait half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half, two hours. Unless you were specially fussy you didn't even put in an appearance at the station till half an hour after the time advertised in Bradshaw. (There was always a chance that the train might not be so late as usual, and it was felt to be prudent not to arrive *more* than half an hour late.) The empty metals would stretch away north and south through the firwoods, and the red College towers would peer over the trees to the east and quarter after quarter would strike on the College clock. Often it would have been quicker to walk to Reading. . . . Since travel was so considerable an undertaking it seemed natural that nine-tenths of every year should be spent at Crowthorne. And after all it wasn't like being confined to a country of landlords. There were no fences. One could wander at will across wood and heath. And all over wild wood and heath ran tracks and

paths which could be bicycled over. Nor have I since discovered a more sensuously exquisite form of motion than, when, free-wheeling downhill through a firwood on a September evening, you sink effortless through pockets of warmth stored beneath the trees into the faint chill of autumn in the open glade, and back into the lingering warmth among the fir-trees again. But seldom indeed, if ever, on foot or bicycle did I voyage five miles from my own front door. Save that in my nursery days, when my grandmother came to stay at Crowthorne, as a rare and expensive treat she would hire Mr. Lovick, the proprietor of the village cab, for a half-crown drive; and she and her companion, or sometimes my mother, and I would drive for an hour and a half at an average speed of about seven miles an hour up the Ridges and home by Yately or the Nine Mile Ride. As the hour approached for Mr. Lovick to fetch us, I would run continually to and fro to our gate to see whether the stately Victoria had turned the corner by the post office yet. There was something at once majestic and soothing about those drives. Rhythmically the hoofs clop-clopped, and the white dust rose behind us, and only once did Mr. Lovick's horse lie down in the road to rest, and even then he was persuaded to rise and resume the journey, obviously refreshed, after not much more than five minutes. And my grandmother would lean back, with her black and white parasol spread out to shield her from the sun, and survey the slowly-passing scenery and remark at intervals, "That is very pretty now"; and I would lean over to watch the wheels go round or occasionally be allowed to

sit beside Mr. Lovick, beaming benevolently upon the box. As for cars, the first, and for long the only, motor-car I entered was a bright red, squarish contraption in which Dr. Colquhoun called one summer evening—in 1902, I should guess. He drove me off with him to his next patient at the top of the village and an excited swarm of children, undeterred by the billowing clouds of dust we raised, accompanied and, if I remember right, easily kept pace with us, to our destination. I climbed out, little suspecting that I had assisted at a revolution, a revolution that would end the world as I knew it, the greatest revolution in history.

This immobilisation in our little island of red brick and heath certainly helped to make childhood even more sequestered. If I had been born thirty years later my schoolmasters at least would no doubt have contrived to introduce into it an astringent breath of the great world by lecturing me about the League of Nations and the Horrors of War. At a tender age I should have attended Civics Classes and clever young masters with leanings towards sentimental Communism would have made me write essays on Mr. Gandhi. From the earliest possible moment I should have been taught that the world was going to be a fair imitation of hell. I am not sorry to have been spared all this myself. I have had quite enough in adult life of the unending crisis which pervades the great world of battleships and bluebooks. I am thankful to have lived a decade or so unshadowed by that sense of impending catastrophe which nowadays seems so horribly real to all right-thinking intellectuals. Nor am I conscious

that, when fate did eventually compel me to interest myself in these high and alarming matters, I was notably handicapped by that brief prelude of agreeable security—I use the word in its classical sense of freedom from anxiety. Indeed, even as it was, it took me some while to find out for myself that world catastrophe is not in fact anything like so probable as it appears to so many earnest persons. If I had been initiated earlier, it might have taken me longer to see through the feeble but fashionable pessimism of our time. And when eventually I watched Mr. Gandhi enter a London drawing-room in a loin-cloth, a shawl and (he said) a spirit of co-operation, my intelligent interest, I really believe, was not appreciably diminished for want of the essay I never wrote.

The South African War, it is true, impinged transiently on the world of my childhood. (I was seven when it began and nine when it finished.) Everybody seemed mildly excited about the affair, in much the same way as, later on, people were excited over football matches at school. My father moved little flags about on a map, and my mother and I pasted pictures from the illustrated weeklies into a scrapbook. And at my kindergarten (thank goodness we never called it that) we wore little enamelled buttons in our buttonholes with portraits of our generals on them. (Nobody did that in the Great War, did they?) They were mostly very unsuccessful generals but we knew them all by sight. It was all quite exciting but remote. We wanted our side to win, but it didn't seem to *matter* very much. There was none of that all-pervasive nervous tension which

rotted the nerves of so many of the children of the Great War, dooming them to become the facile pessimists of to-day. I suppose it was just because it was so remote and unalarming that we were all so demonstratively patriotic. Those who remember only the late war would hardly believe how often and with what gusto we waved flags. Whenever a victory was reported, which was extremely seldom, we stuck Union Jacks out of the upper windows to flutter bravely in the hot sunlight. (It was always summer and always sunny, I may say, during the South African War.) Defeats, which were numerous, did not depress us. Indeed, to be accurate, there were no defeats, only Reverses. And then there was Mafeking day. Seven children marching in single file along the edge of the firs, shouting and waving flags in the sunlight. That was my Mafeking day, and very agreeable I thought it. And that afternoon Queen Victoria drove across to Wellington down the funny dusty roads from Windsor, a little old lady in a black bonnet bowing from a great carriage as we waved more flags by the rhododendron bushes. Long afterwards, when I had read the works of Mr. Wells and other censorious persons, I learned that this was all very reprehensible; and in particular that London that night had proved our national decadence by rioting in a disgraceful orgy of jubilation for this unimportant victory of a great Empire over a small, gallant and almost defenceless people. It is easy to understand Mr. Wells' indignation. Indeed there was a time when, retrospectively, I almost shared it. But nowadays I find that I have a sneaking sympathy for the men and women who

shouted and waved flags and, generally, it seems, raised Cain in London that night. For one thing they were personally expressing satisfaction at the release of a number of their fellow-countrymen from a lengthy and humiliating siege, and since those days I have been in a lengthy and humiliating siege myself and their jubilation seems less irrational. And apart from that, I suppose, they were just waving flags.

Waving flags is as dead as mutton now. Mr. Wells and his friends had done a good deal to scotch it even before 1914; and it went stone dead in the first week of the big war. There may have been a little uncertainty at first, but it was soon obvious that the whole business was a good deal too serious for the older patriotism. I sometimes think I watched that older tradition die. It was in the big music-hall at Brighton about the first week of the War (it used to be as good a show as any in the country, and the best seat in the house cost two shillings). I suppose the War had taken the management by surprise and they were doing their best to cope with an unexampled situation. Anyhow one of the turns billed was a man with some such name as Robert Cripps, who was to sing "patriotic songs." "R. C.," said an inset, "begs to state that during the South African War he sang patriotic songs with huge success all over the British Isles." When his turn came R. C. proved to be a dapper, elderly little man with fiercely waxed grey moustaches. The veins in his forehead swelled like ropes as he bellowed melodies about soldier lads and camp fires and Britain's glory. During the refrains he usually

stood rigidly at the salute and I believe, though I wouldn't swear to it, that he held a Union Jack in one hand. The audience applauded feebly, in obvious embarrassment. I hardly think the turn can have survived long. The Boer War, Jingoism, the Crimea—it was the last flicker of a long tradition. Poor R. C., he was a dug-out. For the first time in a century we were fighting for our lives, and patriotism was out of fashion.

In one other way a Crowthorne childhood might, it is true, have been invaded by the harsh realities of the outer world. We were surrounded by the military. Wellington, for one thing, in those days, was a thoroughly military school. The Royal Military College, known to Wellington masters as Hell-over-the-Hill, was a couple of miles away, through the firwoods. Camberley, adjoining it, housed the Staff College and was thickly studded with officers and officers' wives. And a few miles beyond that Aldershot among its heathery sandhills was a desert of correctitude. And through the firwoods on a summer afternoon would travel the excruciating sounds of Wellington boys practising the bugle, and the distant crack of a rifle on one of the several ranges tucked away in the woods between us and Aldershot. If Crowthorne, so placed, had been in Prussia the children there would no doubt have grown up little militarists. And if my parents had made the curious modern mistake and deliberately taught me that a soldier's is a despicable butcher's trade, I might well, by revulsion, have become an enthusiastic militarist myself when I came to do nine months' soldiering on the peace-

time model, on the North West Frontier, and found, of course, that, albeit a trifle monotonous, it was a robust, honourable and exacting profession. But my parents were neither cranks nor prigs. It didn't occur to them to look askance at my endless games with toy soldiers, cannons and guns, or to provide me instead, as for a while in a first post-war revulsion I provided my own children, with tin farmers, pigs and cowsheds. The fact is that children are a good deal more sensible than most of their elders give them credit for. Pacifist schoolteachers might spare themselves the henlike solicitude with which they protect their charges from the contagion of setting eyes upon uniforms and guns. Tin soldiers and tattoos no more inspire the young to shoot and stab than tin farmyards fill them with a passion to scour pigsties. And, despite our environment, my Crowthorne friends and I did not grow up either militarist or anti-militarist. The young are intolerant, but they do not readily become cranks.

And so—farewell to Crowthorne. Not that in life there are any farewells. What has been is, to the end of time, nor can we escape from it, even if we would. Give me the children till they are seven, says the Jesuit. For the most part, like all childhoods, mine was timeless, or belonged to all time. The Cabbage Whites flickering above the lavender, high against the blue firs; daffodil-picking among last year's fallen leaves in Bishop's Copse; the grey slant of rain in the apple blossom in spring. But much of it doubtless too bore the authentic hallmark of Victorian England, the older England that perished

of the Transport Revolution, of high income tax, of the social services, of the War; the older England in which the rich were so much richer and the poor so much poorer, and for the intermediates money went so much farther; in which wage-earners when old or unemployed starved, unsupported by the State; in which skirts trailed in the dust; in which there were fewer amusements and more peace. The little 'drawing-room for example (it is difficult to resist the pedantic apostrophe; without it the word is so ridiculously suggestive of a studio) with the "Harvest Moon" and its langorous pre-Raphaelite peasants above the mantelpiece, and on the shelf below it—*ornaments*. Ornaments—the word is a mirror of the age. No surface bare. On the mantelshelf some velvety material or other, nailed with decorative brass studs and ending in a heavy fringe; cloths on tables; varnish on wood. And no space empty! One early Christmas an aunt gave me a small china vase of bright yellow. I was delighted. It was an "ornament" for my bedroom mantelshelf. Hitherto there had been an empty space between the nautilus shell and the miniature chest. The shelf therefore needed another ornament. A vase was an ornament—*ex officio*. And provided the space was filled, one ornament was as good as another. This great principle underlay all Victorian *décor*—the loaded "silver tables," the pictures plastered in serried ranks on the floral wallpapers, the archipelagos of ungainly chairs on the 'drawing-room floors. I fancy that there may have been brass Indian, or perhaps pseudo-Indian, ornaments on the mantelshelf in our drawing-room. But what I

remember clearly are the leather travelling-clock and, for a while, the small cardboard model of an old man, with a huge winged collar and a jutting nose, who had an axe in his hand. You pulled a string and the old man actually chopped, the axe descending with a satisfying chonk on to a wooden block. And then one day the figure wasn't there. "Where's the old man with the axe?" I complained. "We've taken it away, dear," said my mother. "You see, that old gentleman with the axe was Mr. Gladstone, and he died yesterday."

The house stood untenanted and empty when I walked up the road past the church the other day. I had been invited to go in and look at it. But I had no wish to disturb that silence. For, so long as no intruder enters, my mother sits sewing in the lamplight and dreams of the years to come. And on the floor beside her lies a small boy, chin on fist, poring over a book.

## II

### ARNOLD TRADITION

It was through Dangerfield that I first encountered the Dark Gentleman. Dangerfield himself, though much, much less unusual than the Dark Gentleman, was odd enough in that particular setting. He had appeared out of the unknown to fill some gap in the staff at Rugby as a temporary master, in the summer term of 1910, a boisterous aesthete disposed to emit dubious paradoxes concerning modern art, accompanied by loud, irreverent laughter, as his senior colleagues gathered glumly for early chapel in the New Quadrangle. This they did not take in good part. Also he would bicycle down the Hillmorton Road with some small member of his form perched upon his step, and flaunt all the heretical opinions fashionable in 1910, and indulge in audible damns. Certainly Dangerfield stood out somewhat garishly against that background. Personally, with some irrepressible misgivings, I was one of his few adherents. He had come to lunch in hall one day earlier that term with my wise old schoolmaster, Whitelaw, who approved of him because he was amusing and because his colleagues didn't, and he had leant forward—I was head of the house and sat opposite Whitelaw—and said to me suddenly, "So playing cricket doesn't prevent you being the school poet?" This reference to my recent prize

poem naturally melted me completely. When years later at tea at Max Gate, Mrs. Thomas' Hardy suddenly produced my youthful first novel and said that her husband had read and enjoyed it and would I please autograph it, I was not more flattered. Not that it was possible to swallow Dangerfield quite unreservedly. It wasn't his loud and sometimes ribald laughter that mattered, nor yet his heresies. Indeed, I have almost forgotten what these were. No doubt, since heresies are rigidly determined by fashion, they were, as I have already said, whatever heresies were fashionable in 1910. And heresies were readily tolerated in the Upper Bench. Moreover, Philip Guedalla, the last head of the school but one, had popularised epigrams, and, unlike the rest of our instructors, Dangerfield was a mine of most unscholastic epigram. For myself I liked epigrams and I was predisposed to applaud almost any unusual idea. Ideas, after all, were all that I understood. I was a clever boy, trained for years to absorb other people's ideas. Of life outside school and home I knew nothing. Potentially, therefore, I was an enthusiastic receptacle for almost any brilliant sophistry, provided always that it did not conflict, past all disguising, with the unconscious loyalties which were now in process of being powerfully reinforced by the Arnold tradition.

The Arnold tradition has been defined by some people as a powerful appeal to moral earnestness, and by others as the ne plus ultra of youthful priggishness. And whichever definition is correct, it is probable that no one who has once come under its domination ever completely shakes off its

influence. He may go wild at Oxford and subsequently earn his living by managing a night club, but he will never altogether stifle secret yearnings to become a pillar of society. The Arnold tradition exists, under other names, at other public schools, but nowhere so powerfully as at Rugby. Was it not Arnold who first made public schools respectable? And in the summer of 1910 I had been for a year head of Whitelaw's and next year was to be head of the school: I was being subjected to the influence of the tradition at its maximum intensity. It is a tradition which does not smile on Dangerfields. The audacity of the paradox twines itself ingratiatingly about the tongue and then—it is as if some apprehensive corner of the mind's eye glimpsed once more the Close and the Doctor's wall, still haunted by the flutter of a formidable gown, and through the bright intellectual trappings peers out the dull fustian, the moral shallowness so deserving of the reprobation of all whom the Doctor's successors have trained, in the Doctor's words, as serious Christian gentlemen. It is a conflict, deep-rooted in English life itself, a conflict between intellect and character, on which England, as a whole, has wisely sided with the Doctor. Is not the Charge of the Light Brigade still regarded as a glory, and not as a disgrace, to British arms? But I feel sure that Jack Greany and I had no thought of the Arnold tradition as we set forth that Sunday in our battered top hats to lunch with Dangerfield where the red-brick villas of the Hillmorton Road drowsed in the silence of a summer noon and the Sabbath plethora. The Dark Gentleman could scarcely have been encountered in

a less suitably mysterious setting. Outside, the unlovely provincial town, as clear-cut and 'matter-of-fact as a gasometer, set in the familiar girdle of field and hedgerow, and within, the equally familiar villa lodgings—the landlady's parlour suite scarcely disguised by a Medici print or two of Dangerfield's, a Baby Grand which he had squeezed into a corner, a shelf or two of books which no landlady would have accumulated and a pile of Bach and Debussy scores tossed down in an arm-chair. During lunch, Dangerfield was as boisterous and whimsical as ever. He made play, I remember, with the prolonged chorus of "All-ow me!" which he had heard shouted from Whitelaw's across the road on the previous evening. It was, in fact, a local abbreviation for "allow me to congratulate you," wailed out, according to ancient ritual, by the house for five or ten minutes because, as it happened, I had just been accorded some variety of school cricket colours; but Dangerfield affected to suppose that the dolorous uproar was occasioned by our housemaster, Mr. Whitelaw, who was celebrated for his strong views upon the Greek particles, conducting a concerted exercise in the use of *ou mè*. But neither Jack nor I paid as much attention as we might have to all this. We were both somewhat distracted by the dark gentleman. We had not expected another guest: certainly not so unusual a guest as this. And though the dark gentleman scarcely spoke during the meal, he produced somehow an effect of contributing, and contributing queerly, to the conversation. He listened with the faintest of attentive smiles, and an occasional curiously

inscrutable twinkle from behind gold spectacles, a twinkle which one could not help feeling to be a comment. He was not really very dark. Not Hindu, Calcutta, dark; rather the lightish coffee of a Mahommedan hill tribe. Not that there was even any evidence, as far as I remember, that he was Indian. He might have come from Syria, or even Smyrna. It seems to me now that, apart from complexion, there must have been a distinct resemblance to Gandhi, whom of course I had never then seen. Not that the dark gentleman wore sandals; nor were there any of those curious, almost simian, thrustings of skinny dark arms out of the ample folds of a homespun shawl. The dark gentleman dressed like a European. But there was the same general effect of peering and thoughtful silence, the same sudden mild and friendly smile, the same queer suggestion of helplessness tempered by inscrutability. Dangerfield did not explain him, either then or later; "this is a friend of mine" being all that he vouchsafed.

After lunch Dangerfield went, as usual, to the piano. Soon after he had reached *L'après midi d'un faune* I found myself outside in the little garden with the dark gentleman. Jack stayed in to listen. He was more musical than I, as well as more polite, but he cast a wistful glance at us as we went out, for he too would have liked to investigate the dark gentleman. But the convention between us was that I was the leader, and accordingly better qualified to consort with distinguished strangers. It was not till we read Greats together at Oxford that I first suspected that he was the better man; a suspicion afterwards

amply confirmed by the War. "It is a warm afternoon," said the dark gentleman on the little lawn outside. It was almost the longest observation he had yet permitted himself. But he made it with such a searching look at me that I knew he did not expect an answer. One is apt to be flattered at eighteen when elderly strangers betray an interest in one: but somehow on this occasion I was not flattered, only slightly perturbed. At the bottom of the lawn he stopped and clasped his hands, staring down at the ground.

"Mr. Dangerfield said that you would have a happy life," he said thoughtfully. And I remembered that Dangerfield had once flung out some off-hand remark about my being the sort of person who would always get what he wanted, though it had been some days earlier, I thought, that he had said it.

"Shan't I?" I said stupidly.

"Perhaps it is not happiness to obtain hwat we desire," said the dark gentleman.

I realised uncomfortably that he was replying to what I had thought and not to what I had said. My peculiar companion made as if to resume our saunter and then, seeing, I suppose, that I had become a mute interrogation mark, smiled benevolently and paused again. He thought for a moment and then, apparently choosing his words carefully as if to suit the intelligence of a child;

"There are many different you's," he said, "and it may be that they will have different goals. You are fascinated by hwat is new," and here I almost thought that he glanced meaningly at the house

from which Dangerfield's interpretation of Debussy still issued resonantly. "Yet you will always revere what is old. You desire tranquillity yet you will have to encounter hardships and dangers unimaginable to you now. You admire stability and order, but you will have to witness untold revolution and chaos. Perhaps that may be a happy life; I cannot tell. I do not understand your system of education." He spoke with a curious half-aspiration of the w—like Gandhi. We had resumed our pacing and still I did not find anything to say. To tell the truth I was feeling very uncomfortable. I realised, of course, that any one can prophesy, if he has sufficient temerity. And yet the dark gentleman's pronouncement had been so very confident. And there was undoubtedly something about him which unpleasantly suggested a diagnosis, pronounced after an unobstructed inspection of my interior. In the ordinary course of events I should have been far from resentful of a stranger who felt impelled to discuss my future: but there was something humiliating in marching along thus tongue-tied while the dark gentleman discoursed with such calm, and, I could not help feeling, such highly critical detachment upon my character and prospects. Moreover I resented feeling so juvenile and so embarrassed. I remembered Jack Greany and the report he would expect from me as soon as we were on our way home, and decided that I must pull myself together. Instinctively I summoned the public-school system to my aid. Was not I head of Whitelaw's, and this a foreigner, knowing nothing of the intellectual distinctions of the Upper Bench,

wholly innocent of cricket teams, alien to the Arnold tradition—and, what was more, a coloured foreigner at that?

“Do you tell fortunes, then?” I blurted out. I meant this to have a manly, almost a scornful, twang. The colonel meets a gipsy. But somehow it sounded wrong; there was almost a quaver. The dark gentleman smiled again, which increased my irritation.

“I have done so.”

“You weren’t very definite this time, were you?” I said pertly. He raised his eyebrows.

“Do you want me to say something more definite then?” I realised that I didn’t, but one had to keep one’s end up with a coloured foreigner. It seemed best to convey that I took just the mild interest in him that ordinary politeness required. To decline might suggest timidity. And all this although I couldn’t suppress the uncomfortable suspicion that he was perfectly well aware of my private reflections.

“Oh, yes, please,” I said; quite airily.

“Hwell, I will try—though you hwill not believe me.” He frowned thoughtfully. “We shall meet again, when you are completing your education, four days’ journey from an inland sea.”

It was my turn to raise my eyebrows. Had not Nurse Lambden this sort of thing with a tea-cup? I smiled condescendingly. The Colonel Sahib flings a rupee to the Indian conjurer.

“It is not enough? Very hwell,” he said kindly. And then, turning his back to the house, he pulled a leather wallet from his breast pocket. Out of this he very carefully extracted a sheet of thin, greyish

paper folded in two. Holding it reverently in both hands, as if it were some precious and fragile piece of porcelain, he held it out to me. The back of it, I saw, was covered with some faint and intricate intertwining of hieroglyphs, like the watermark on a five-pound note.

"Take this, hwill you?"

I could not help taking it from him with the same absurd cautiousness.

"Hwat do you see inside the paper?"

I opened it. It was just an empty grey sheet.

"Nothing."

"Hwill you look at the outside again?"

I turned the page and stared obediently and unintelligently at the intricate design. It was the same hieroglyph endlessly repeated, I observed.

"That is the Arabic numeral seven."

"Oh, yes?"

"Now hwill you look at the inner side again?"

Once more I turned the leaf. There could be no mistake. The whole of both inner sides was now covered with a picture. It suggested more than anything else a photograph of a very careful and detailed pencil drawing. I felt myself gaping stupidly. I thought to myself irrelevantly, "Now I know the meaning of the words, 'His head was in a whirl.'" My head certainly felt as if it was spinning round and round at an immense speed. The dark gentleman's voice seemed to come from an immense distance.

"You see it?"

I did. I saw a tree with a water-trough and a rough wooden bench beneath it. Opposite, there

seemed to be a door leading into the obscurity of a building. A nondescript figure in a fur cap, with a stick, or possibly a rifle, slung across its back, was advancing towards the door. Behind followed several other figures. I looked up at the dark gentleman, speechless.

"Look close, hwill you?" he said kindly.

I looked again. Was one of these figures—myself? I was almost sure that it was. I thrust the paper hurriedly into his hands and found myself rubbing my own hands feverishly together with a cleansing motion behind my back. The dark gentleman and I walked back up the three steps into the sitting-room without another word. To my astonishment *L'après midi d'un faune* was not yet over. Jack looked up curiously. . . .

If this were a ruthless and fashionable modern novel it would have to depict the Rugby of that time as a picturesque cesspool of profanity and vice, full of sadistic prefects, uncomprehending pedagogues and melancholy, thwarted young geniuses. I hope that what I have already hinted of the sovereign Arnold tradition will have prepared the reader for the surprising fact that in none of these respects did life, as I encountered it, imitate art. Worst of all, I am not even sure that, except for Whitelaw, there were any geniuses, misunderstood or otherwise, at Rugby in my time. So many of that generation perished in its early twenties that it didn't in any case have much chance of exhibiting any genius it may have possessed. But Rupert Brooke was there during my first year, and even

Rupert Brooke, though he may well have been a genius, can hardly claim to have been melancholy or thwarted. He was head of his house and in both school teams, and my only memory of him as a schoolboy is of a tall figure with a flapping mop of fair hair surging rather clumsily forward through the opposing three-quarter backs in a school "foreign." Poor Rupert, he went sadly out of fashion in the Post-War phase. There was so much that it was impossible to forgive him—his good looks, his normality, his idealism about the War, his romantic end, his "legend," above all, perhaps, the sales of his poetry. I remember my first mild surprise when, coming back after the War, I was introduced to the new literary standards by a writer of the post-war vintage which had superseded Rupert and his kind, a genial, black-avised Polish Jew from Lancashire, who stood about five feet high and had naturally had nothing to do with the War. About which, however, he was already being bitterly sardonic in strictly unrhythmical verse. The little gentleman chuckled in genuine amusement at the mere mention of Rupert Brooke's name. . . .

It is odd, when you come to think of it, that at various epochs Literature should have pronounced such contradictory verdicts upon the public schools, and that the verdict should have been so uniformly inaccurate. Years ago it was customary to believe that the Battle of Waterloo had been won on the playing fields of the public schools. Yet in 1815 only eight public schools were in existence, and all of them were corrupt, inefficient and generally mistrusted. Nor were there any public schools at all in Scotland,

Wales or England north of the Trent. To-day, on the contrary, at a time when you can put a boy's name on the list of a great school at birth without being certain that room will eventually be found for him, an inquirer who depended on what he read in up-to-date fiction or the critical reviews would almost inevitably conclude that the whole system—so rarely referred to in print by a former pupil save in terms of savage hatred and contempt—must be drawing its last breath amidst the unanimous execration of the class for which it had once catered.

In that summer in which I first encountered the Dark Gentleman it was in the House that for me the Arnold tradition bulked largest. As a house, the House was negligible. Designed to shelter, at a fantastic cost to their parents, fifty-six young gentlemen between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, it might well have occasioned, like most of the other public school boarding-houses I have come across, the gravest discontent among the parents of board-school pupils, had their offspring been consigned to it by the State at the public expense. The house, however, was not a house so much as a House, which is to say at once an exacting Idea and also, of course, the fifty-six young gentlemen themselves—for whose discipline, morals and welfare Jack Greany and I, with assistance from two or three other youths, were at that time to an astonishing extent responsible. This being where, for good or ill, the Arnold tradition fastened itself finally and irresistibly upon us. We are to be pictured, Jack and I, any time between September, 1909, and July, 1911, sitting in my study, a chamber

measuring about twelve feet by eight, revolving, with how full, how very full, a sense of our responsibility, some one or more of the countless problems which necessarily present themselves to the conscientious ruler over fifty-six young gentlemen. We are not always serious by any means, but when we are serious, how devastatingly serious we are! Since that time I have watched a colonel in the heat of action directing the defence of a half-breached fort on which the safety of an army hung, and I have sat in the study of a weary Prime Minister while the pound sterling wavered like a rag in a high wind and he was to launch on the morrow an election campaign upon which the fate of the British Empire seemed to hang. But I have seen no one more conscious of the burdens of responsibility than was I myself in those far off days. "It's about time we dropped on Pascoe," I say, and Jack nods gloomily. The code which justified Pascoe's forthcoming execution lay at the roots of the System; but although, such is the force of habit, I still find it intelligible and indeed reasonable, it isn't perhaps too easy to explain to an outsider. The basis of it all, I should say, was the doctrine of *hubris*, a Homeric word, of which a rather inadequate English equivalent is "arrogance." In Whitelaw's any suspicion of arrogance must be dropped on, as surely as in a Greek tragedy any display of *hubris* brought retribution in its train. Now at Rugby, at any rate at Whitelaw's, unless you were a person of recognised importance you were not supposed to "rag," to indulge, that is to say, in audible horse-play, inside the House. The Sixth and a few other persons of

distinction were above the law, though even the Sixth, when I was head of the House, I strongly discouraged from playing in the house quadrangle the innocent games with balls and coins to which they were accustomed. It was, I said, a bad example. (You begin to perceive, I hope, something of what the Arnold tradition could mean.) Now obviously fifty young gentlemen in rude health couldn't expect to vent all their high spirits outside the House, and though, if horse-play in the studies had been completely unrestricted, life would have become impossible for the studious, one usually wouldn't take much notice of muffled thud and scuffle, provided of course that it wasn't excessive, and above all that it didn't for one reason or another suggest *hubris*, that is to say that the culprit was getting above himself. On *hubris* you always dropped, if necessary waiting your time as patiently as the gods in Sophocles. Whether the evidence of *hubris* was excessive noise or excessive vanity, rough conduct or smooth hair, it was sure to be a symptom of something worse—for this too, there is good Sophoclean authority. And since technically even mild ragging in the studies was *tabu*, it followed that if you felt it your duty to drop on a hubristic Pascoe because he was advertising his insignificant existence by offensively oiling his hair, it was never long before he provided you with a pretext. You heard him ragging and whereas, had he not been suspected of *hubris*, you would merely have told him, in the vernacular, to be quiet, now in due course you summoned him to the House Library and his fate. Not, let me apologetically interpolate, with the

notorious Sadistic satisfaction of the prefect of school fiction. I at least can lay hand on heart and declare that neither Jack Greany nor I took the slightest *pleasure* in these intermittent executions. I preferred beating to being beaten, but I would not put it much higher than that. All this may suggest a barbaric and oppressive, or perhaps a merely unintelligible, regime. In its defence it can at least be said that the occasional chastisements, which did unerringly, I believe, contrive to select the genuinely hubristic, were no more resented by the young gentlemen in general, or the victims in particular, than I resented my own solitary visit, in the passive rôle, to the House Library. As I look back on that painful and, while I was at Rugby, that unique episode, I can see, I admit, no obvious rational justification for it. I had been "ragging," but that was all. But I was told that I was getting above myself and it did not occur to me for a moment to question either verdict or sentence.

It seems odd perhaps that oiling the hair should have been regarded as suspicious. The fact was that at Rugby you did not conspicuously oil your hair or crease your trousers; you even, I fancy, oiled and creased them insufficiently. To oil and crease conspicuously was considered vulgar. When the school departed on holiday or exeat one youth, and one alone, was to be seen wearing white spats, and he, needless to say, was an aggressive hair-oiler too. We despised him wholeheartedly. At that time Etonians returning for long leave were well brushed, well creased and white-spatted almost to a man. Impressive, and yet—was there not something to be

said for the Rugby prejudice? A bourgeois prejudice perhaps; our prejudices at Rugby—for solidity, modesty and seriousness—all smacked of the burghess; but then are not burghesses the pillars of the State? We carried the tradition a step further at Whitelaw's just then. When I became head of the House I determined that discipline, like patriotism, was not to be enough. The morals of the House were to be the special anxiety of the head boy. One should know *why* Pascoe was oiling his hair. Perhaps a word in season. . . . The fifty-six young gentlemen were to be fifty-six perpetual moral problems. Accordingly I devised a system by which the senior members of the Sixth were to drop in now and again to the studies of the smallest boys and chat in an amicable and avuncular way with them. These injunctions were actually carried out. Nor was the word in season confined to individuals. We were cock-house in both the years I was head of the House, and when the cup had been brought in to hall and the cheering was over I earnestly exhorted the House to preserve a modest demeanour in public. It complied: it was even liked by the other Houses, which was unusual for a cock House. All this moral tyranny, in fact, showed every sign of having been good for Whitelaw's. Even to-day it is my considered opinion that it was good for Whitelaw's. But granted that it was all good for Whitelaw's, there remains the question whether it was good for Jack Greany and me. And that is a good deal more doubtful. I don't think it would have made any lasting difference to Jack, even if he had survived the war. For one thing, despite his shining qualities, he was second-in-

command. What was more, he had been from birth conscientious to a fault. Nerving himself for unpleasant tasks on behalf of other people was his second nature. It is characteristic of all the survivors of his family to this day. His sister, for example, should be by rights what she seems to be, one of ten thousand gentle ladies living admirable but slightly monotonous lives in a London suburb. Actually a month rarely passes without her rescuing somebody else's prodigal child from a workhouse, being threatened by a homicidal lunatic whose relative she has almost beggared herself to assist, forcing her way, on somebody else's errand, into a millionaire's private office, or burying and executing the (disconcerting) last wishes of a complete stranger. And all because she is instantly recognised by every one she meets as a person who will do anything for anybody. Accordingly, with Jack, the Arnold tradition did but ask of him what it was his nature to do. If he had not been screwing himself up to drop casually and conversationally into fags' studies in the interests of the *esprit de corps* of the House he would undoubtedly have been screwing himself up to do something equally distasteful for somebody else. But to me this sort of thing came much less naturally. Left to myself there was a strong vein of the Dangerfield in me, and, unbuttressed by the Arnold tradition, I should probably have been composing poetry in an arm-chair instead of agonising over the moral problems of the House. The good life accordingly increasingly presented itself as a struggle against natural inclinations, a perpetual screwing of oneself up to do something unpleasant;

indeed, the more unpleasant a thing was, the more certain one became that it must be one's duty.

One wet afternoon in the Easter term I went a cross-country walk with a younger colleague in Whitelaw's Sixth. He was not long out of the Twenty and these exacting notions were fermenting powerfully in him. The rain set in heavier than ever. We were wearing football shorts and blazers and we were a good four miles from home. Personally I enjoy getting wet in old clothes, but Wilfred disliked the cold trickle down his neck. However, he suggested as an afterthought that with respectable will-power one ought to be able to forget trifling physical discomforts. And, as we squelched across one of those vast, level Warwickshire meadows which about this time were causing Siegfried Sassoon to yearn for the Midlands as the huntin' man's paradise, we pursued the subject. One ought never to allow oneself to be scared of anything, we decided. If one found that one was afraid of doing a thing one ought to make a point of forcing oneself to do it. That was the only way to strengthen the will, and will was everything. At this point, as chance would have it, we debouched into a soggy, sunken lane bounded on the farther side by a high stone wall. The top of the wall was not very high above the field on the far side, but the drop into the lane seemed to be a good twelve feet, and the lane was all loose stones and mud. To my annoyance Wilfred paused and eyed it thoughtfully. "I'm going to jump back off that wall," he said.

"What on earth for?"

"Because I don't like the look of it."

"Don't be a silly young ass," I protested. "We're late enough already; and you'll probably sprain your ankle like you did last year. It must be a twelve-foot drop."

Wilfred stared at me reproachfully.

"Didn't you mean what you were saying just now then?"

There seemed to be no answer to this. He scrambled up some rough steps in the bank to a stile and in a few seconds was poising himself gracefully on the summit of the wall.

"Silly young fool," I muttered. I knew exactly what was going to happen. He jumped, landed with a thud, rolled over into a puddle and sat up with a wry face, rubbing his leg.

"I have," he said.

"Have what?"

"Sprained my ankle."

"Damn," I said. "Wait a minute." And I clambered up the wall.

Wilfred sat up angrily in the mud.

"What on earth are you up to? I say, my ankle's hurting frightfully."

"Sorry, but I'm going to jump off this wall."

"What on earth for?"

"For the same reason that you did."

"Don't be a fool. I'm sure I can't walk a yard, and if you sprain your ankle too, we shall be stuck here all night. Nobody will come down this lane for weeks."

By this time I had crouched and dropped carefully over the edge. Apart from spattering a fountain of mud and water over both of us I came to no harm.

But I had to half-carry, half-support Wilfred for more than a quarter of a mile to the nearest human habitation. His fair hair flopped over his eyes and every now and again he emitted an irritable, half-suppressed "Ow!" It all came back to me vividly when I first escorted a wounded man back to the field dressing-station. With some difficulty we found an ancient cab to drive us back to Rugby. On the way we decided that we would tell nobody exactly why Wilfred had had to jump. "Of course that's really funking, just as much as it would have been if we hadn't done the jump," he said implacably, and there seemed no answer to this either. But I let it pass and we didn't tell a soul. Wilfred himself was wiped out five years later in one of the fore-doomed Somme fiascos, quite in the Balaclava tradition. As he slowly died, with fading, jumbled memories of who knows what childish scenes, I can fancy that he was visited by a grim, fleeting satisfaction. He had screwed himself up—for the last time.

I am told nowadays that the most important qualification for the head master of a public school is that he should be unlike his predecessor, and that if the last head master was an idealist, a fine teacher and a power in the pulpit, the new head master should be a sceptical man of affairs, a great builder, with a passion not so much for sermons as for drains. I dare say this is a sound plan; in any case, it has produced that comparatively recent phenomenon, the head master in grey flannel trousers; the head master who drops into the boys' studies and calls them by their Christian names. Dr. James, who was

head master during my first years at Rugby, did not wear grey flannel trousers. Nor did he drop into our studies or call us by our Christian names. Top-hatted and remote, he was nothing if not dignified. And as he was short and stout and wore a prophetic grey beard beneath which there was quite manifestly no tie, this in itself was no mean feat. But it was an indispensable one. If he had not been dignified he would not, in that age, have been a head master. For the first qualification required of a head master in Dr. James's day was that he should as closely as possible resemble an Old Testament prophet. Small boys would be bidden to breakfast in the School House, seven or eight at a time, trembling as in the shadow of Sinai itself. The head master would enter a few minutes late, bark "Morning!" to the quavering chorus of "Good-morning, sir," and sit without uttering another word through the rest of the meal. At the other end of the table his lady housekeeper would converse agreeably about the weather with the children in her immediate vicinity. But all save those in her immediate vicinity were frozen to a stupor by the silent Presence at the far end of the table. At last the head master would rise, bark "Morning!" once more and pass out of sight. As they gazed after him, dumb and wide-eyed, an audible sigh would ripple through his guests. They had survived.

Later on, when one was in the Sixth, one would be invited, fewer at a time and to dinner. At these gatherings there was conversation, and after dinner even paper games in which you had to compile lists of rivers and birds and famous soldiers whose names

began with some letter which the head master had selected, apparently at random, from a book. You divided into sides, and the head master's side invariably won, and by an enormous margin. There was wine at dinner and to my horror, the first time I was a guest, I cannoned lightly against the door as we left the dining-room. A terrifying suspicion dawned on me. I wasn't used to wine; could this be being drunk? As the slips of paper were dealt round I broke into a light perspiration. Supposing I *was* drunk. . . . Presumably I shouldn't be able to think of a single mountain beginning with G. Or if I did contrive to write something down, might it not prove, when the time came to read out my list, to be all gibberish—possibly even slightly improper gibberish? You couldn't tell—if you were drunk, only the growing horror on the faces of your fellow-guests would undeceive you. . . .

But Whitelaw, I suppose, belonged even more obviously to another age. It is impossible to associate Whitelaw's with the regime of grey flannel trousers. Short, bent, bald-pated, with his pink round face and round spectacles, and his old-fashioned tail coat, he must have been about sixty-five at that time, and he looked anything up to a hundred. At Cambridge, in the infinitely distant past, he had been Senior Classic and a Fellow of Trinity, and he was one of the first authorities on Sophocles. He had been teaching the classical *Twenty* for twenty-five, for thirty, for forty years—nobody knew to a decade for how long. The grandfather of one of my contemporaries had been in the *Twenty* under Whitelaw. And he still taught with unabated passion. This is the surest

hall-mark of the great teacher. To teach with passionate enthusiasm is rarer than to have a magnificent tenor voice, but to teach with passionate enthusiasm for forty years is rarer than to be a Caruso. And Whitelaw was that most infrequent phenomenon, a great teacher. No scientific principles, no highly rationalised system, you observe. For in teaching, as in life, it is instinct and experience which matter, not systems. There is, it is true, a science of teaching. A formidable technical literature about kindergartens extends, steadily diminishing in volume and authority, into the elementary school and even into the earlier stages of the secondary. But long before it begins to threaten the University, it is not. Nobody tells Universities how to teach. Nobody dares to tell Universities how to teach. The system at Oxford and Cambridge is simple. The Fellows of the Colleges are elected; they then teach; that is all. Thus the further the student advances, the greater the distance he places between himself and scientific teaching, and as the shades of the prison house descend upon the growing boy he trails clouds of Froebelism as well as of glory. In State schools authority makes some show of seeing that the children of the poor, who cannot defend themselves, are taught on scientific principles. But nobody would dream of staffing an expensive public school, where the parents expect the best their money can buy, with teachers who had been scientifically trained. For though you can be taught how to give lessons, you cannot be taught how to teach. A school, which, having first chosen intelligent masters, then proceeds to eliminate those

who are unable to keep order in their class-rooms, and leaves the rest to evolve their own methods, will not go far wrong. The only Professor of Education I have come across myself used, it was said, to deliver most erudite lectures upon the latest theories of the psychologists. But unfortunately it was part of his duties to give occasional demonstrations of his methods in the class-rooms of neighbouring schools; and the hours over which the learned gentleman presided, and which were anticipated with the utmost eagerness by his temporary pupils, were invariably a scene of protracted and deafening disorder.

Whitelaw, in any case, was a genius, and for genius there are no rules. Standing at his lectern, and passing his hand impatiently to and fro across his bald pate—which was scarcely visible above it—he would toss his head in a rhythmic ecstasy as he declaimed in a high-pitched sing-song some Sophoclean chorus or his own English version of the Eclogues. Anything beautiful, anything interesting, moved him to intense excitement. And to him everything he taught was either beautiful or interesting, and usually both. In his hands, the Greek conjunctions became profound and stirring moral problems. The basest particle in grammar reached us fraught with deep significance. He was a Cambridge man, and no detail of scholarship was permitted to escape us. But when he approached the great passages of literature—for the hundredth time maybe—every wrinkle in his gown conveyed that he was walking before us into a sanctuary. His head would toss and his hand would beat impatiently on

the lectern edge as he chanted the magic words. Sometimes only the subdued passion of his chant would convey that we were being led into another holy place.

*Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping,  
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.*

Every inch of him would respond to each ictus in the rhythm. But sometimes he would warn us where we found ourselves. *The place whereon thou standest, so to speak, is holy ground.* I still remember him in the House pupil-room—I must have been about fifteen at the time—chanting forth those lines in the *Odyssey* which tell of the maiden Nausicaa's meeting with Ulysses, cast up naked on the beach. "And if there's anybody here," he interjected suddenly, with a fierce glitter of his round spectacles, "who doesn't realise that he is in the presence of great literature, *I am sorry for him.*" That observation taught me more of literary values than anything I ever read. Rupert Brooke said that a Shakespeare lesson with Whitelaw was like a beautiful dream. I wasn't literary enough for this myself and used to like Whitelaw on Homer best. It must have been a little later in the same term that we came to the lines about the couple who are happily wed, and all their neighbours know it and are glad—

"But they know of it most themselves." He repeated these words crooningly twice, almost in a whisper, stroking his pate with that feverish circular motion. They sank deep into my consciousness. Woe betide the solemn School Marshall if he

entered the Twenty with his sheaf of notices when Whitelaw was either thus rapt from earth or in a state of exasperation, and he was almost always one or the other. On such occasions Whitelaw would rate him as if he was a Lower School boy. Questionable manners, I sometimes thought, but then had not Whitelaw, according to tradition, chased the headmaster himself round his own table? Always fierce with the uncomprehending, he was specially fierce when it was in the presence of some one of these grandeurs that we were obtuse. It was as if from within the sanctuary he was suddenly reminded, in his rapture, of the timorous and clumsy flock still shouldering sheepishly on the threshold. "Miserable creature, where are your wits?" he would begin passionately. And he exacted formidably high standards. Every lesson began with a paper containing about twenty questions, in which you were expected to be able not only to reproduce notes and subject matter but to quote great chunks of the text, verbatim. Naturally all this meant no mean strain for boys under sixteen—and you waited in the Twenty till you were sixteen before you might enter the Sixth. In the summer term when it grew light early, Jack Greany and I used to train ourselves to wake early, morning after morning, at four o'clock and keep awake with the help of a sponge of cold water, to work for a couple of hours in bed at that morning's preparation. And this although we would probably have done at least a couple of hours' work at that same lesson in our studies the evening before. Considering that we were growing fast at the time and

that the normal school day, without these voluntary additions, consisted of at least nine hours' work, often more, or else six to seven hours' work and several hours' cricket, Rugby at this time can hardly be said to have fostered the intellectual sloth which the authors of school fiction usually bewail.

Though Whitelaw was a great teacher and, in my estimation, a great man, he was not, in my time, a great Housemaster. Personally I came to know him intimately during my last two years at Rugby, and my wayward character received a lasting impress, I have no doubt, from that extraordinary personality. But it was possible to go through his House without getting to know Whitelaw, although he, no doubt, would know a good deal about you. You could watch the little bent figure in the old-fashioned tail-coat stepping in, eyes on the ground, with that bird-like, pecking motion of the head, to lunch or prayers; you might doze through the abstruse soliloquies he delivered to the House every Sunday evening (you had already been to two and possibly to three services in Chapel and Whitelaw's sermons, curiously enough, were far above our heads), though you certainly could not doze when once in a way, instead of anatomising Saint Paul, he would read Matthew Arnold's *Rugby Chapel* or something from his admired Browning—for Whitelaw was incomparably the finest *reader* I have ever heard; you might start when he turned fiercely upon you for translating the Homeric *gaster* as "stomach"—"Who's afraid of belly? *Belly, belly, belly, belly, belly!*" But all the same you might never *know*

Whitelaw. It was easier for me. To begin with, as head of the House, I sat opposite him at lunch. He stayed with us once or twice in the holidays too. And he wrote wonderful letters to my father and me in which he traced masterly analogies between the politicians of the day and the characters in Thucydides. He was a Radical of the old school, the only school, in my experience, that Radicals ever are of. For him politics, like everything else, was a stirring and majestic drama in which right was locked in an endless death-struggle with wrong, or rather with stupidity, which was the same thing. He seemed always to be looking on at the spectacle of life like the Athenians watching the naval engagement in the bay of Syracuse, with such anguished excitement, in that Thucydidean passage he admired so much, that they swayed to and fro with the changing fortunes of the battle. He would come into lunch shaking with anger at a *Punch* drawing by E. T. Reed of Sir George Otto Trevelyan. "He does splendid service in Ireland and when he comes back, this Reed draws him like a monkey, like a *monkey*!" I remember standing with Whitelaw in the flower-garden—he was staying with us in our Squirearchical period—and saying apologetically with a nod towards the park stretching beyond the yew-hedge. "Of course nobody ought to own as much land as this." And he replied with an affectionate twinkle, "Of course they oughtn't." Not that I had the least intention of urging my father to present his acres to the State. Not that Whitelaw either, I suppose, would have thought of surrendering any portion of the comfortable income he earned

—any more than the wealthy pundits of the Redder Socialism, as far as I know, propose to strip themselves of the wealth whose possession they assert to be a sin against society. Such uncommon and quixotic gestures indeed come more often from Conservatives like Mr. Baldwin. We meant, I think, no more than that the possession of land in particular, for landowners were traditionally Tory, and, to some extent no doubt, of any sort of prosperity, was something about which a well-brought-up person should feel apologetic.

As head of the House I made a point of telling Whitelaw what was going on. I would wait behind after prayers in the evening and say, "We've been having trouble with Pascoe—or Scott-Barrington," as the case might be. He would respond with heaving shoulders and rich soprano laughter, or sometimes with a profound, rumbling sigh, his mouth curving grimly down into a crescent. And sometimes for a long while he would stand, one hand gripping my shoulder and the other fumbling in his coat tails, his eyes fixed on the ground, saying nothing at all. On these occasions he never gave me orders. He did not even prompt or dissuade. Yet I must always have been learning, for he was prodigiously wise. I have met one or two men since whose scholarship was perhaps as mellow and as profound, but never one whose scholarship was so passionately alive, or played so luminously over life. And it was my good fortune that this fiery, tender-hearted, wise old man was fond of me and that in my callow and malleable youth I was admitted to his intimacy. I have been unworthy of what he

tried to teach me, but I owe him an incalculable debt for having tried.

The convention with the unhappy novelists of the Post-War era used commonly to be that, besides being dens of cruelty and vice, public schools were a desert of Philistinism, tragically inhospitable to the Ideas of which they were themselves so prodigiously fertile. My own complaint, curiously enough, would be almost precisely the opposite. It belongs to human nature that many boys should go through school, as afterwards through life, wholly unsusceptible to the contagion of Ideas. And this is just as well for the world—whose welfare hangs, not upon countless mediocre intelligences fermenting with ill-digested abstractions, but upon the existence of a small minority of powerful intellects, capable of mastering and mysteriously transmuting the intellectual currency of their day. In any event, only the sharp-witted can absorb Ideas, and, at my public school at any rate, the sharp-witted were absorbing Ideas night and day, and what is more, were admired by their school-fellows for absorbing them. The danger was that they might absorb too many and absorb them too quickly. For these were Ideas pumped in from other people's minds and unrelated not only to experience but to any sort of practical training whatever. From beginning to end of a lengthy and, but for scholarships, an extremely expensive education, nobody, for example, spent an hour teaching me to do anything whatever with my hands. On another plane the great Lenin would seem to have

suffered from much the same disability. Peter the Great prepared himself for autocracy by working in the shipyards of Deptford and Amsterdam, Lenin by reading in the British Museum. Consequently when Lenin in his turn became autocrat of all the Russias, he continued to see the world as a set of symbols, as one sees it from a reading-room. His entourage was of the same myopic brand. When machinery fell to pieces, factories decayed, organisation broke down and goods were not delivered, they either shot their subordinates or drew diagrams, plotted graphs, filled up forms and wrote out reports. They had learnt their trade from books, and though books make good revolutionaries they do not make good rulers. The public school mill, no doubt, was grinding out no embryo Lenins. But at many schools the clever boys were apt to be trained to rootless *apriorisme* and facile generalisation. At Rugby, thanks to Arnold's Sixth system, the clever boys ruled the others. Involuntarily they began to learn that success in practical affairs requires character and instinct as well as intelligence, and that human beings do not necessarily respond to formulas because the formulas are brilliantly phrased. But most of the public schools continued to regard Balaclava as a glory rather than a disgrace and to entrust authority not to the quick-witted but to the stout-limbed. No salutary taste of responsibility diluted the spate of Ideas which inevitably deluges upon a clever adolescent. Moreover, brawn as ruler was naturally apt to breed contempt and discontent in the nimbler-witted ruled. Hence even before 1918 more inferiority complex than was good

for them in too many public-school intellectuals. And an inferiority complex is the unacknowledged root of more than fifty per cent. of all Advanced opinion.

Of the Ideas which poured in torrents upon our receptive intelligences, not a very high proportion, it is true, concerned the political controversies of the day. It was a happier and therefore a less political age. In our day Dangerfield talked Art; the Dangerfields of to-day would be busy with a Communist cell. All the same, such political ideas as were wafted my way at Rugby were far from being steeped, as in the public schools of fiction, in the economic interests of the possessing classes. The main assault on the prosperous was just then being directed by Mr. Lloyd George, who was engaged in laying the foundations of social insurance and incidentally of the taxation to finance it, and tempers were beginning to rise. The parents who sent their sons to Rugby belonged to the prosperous, indeed to the very prosperous, classes. Yet in so far as Rugby introduced me to contemporary politics at all, which was certainly not very far, it was to a brand of politics distinctly hostile to the prosperous. Whitelaw, to begin with, was a Lloyd George man. Then in my last year Jakk Greany and I were taken by another master to a meeting in the town at which Sidney Webb was discoursing on the Socialist Minority Report on the Poor Law. I did not find this an exhilarating experience. And once too Rupert Brooke, then at the climax of his Cambridge career, came down one golden evening at the end of the summer term and

read a paper, in the garden of School Field, to Eranos, the Upper Bench Literary Society, on "The Artist under Socialism." But of this all that I now remember is his tremendous fair mane and grey flannel suit and the tranquil summer evening and the fact that he was watchfully attended by Mr. J. T. Shepherd, of King's. The only address I can remember being given officially by a politician to the school was an autobiographical lecture—needless to say after Dr. James' day—by Will Crookes, a rugged and proletarian Labour M.P. We liked Will Crookes. And if an audience likes a speaker it does not much matter what he says; he is a successful propagandist.

Such political persuasion as can be said to have been exercised on me at Rugby ran thus all counter to the interests of the prosperous. But the political persuasion amounted to practically nothing: which was all to the credit of Rugby. Obviously there was no *tabu* on Socialism. We were neither sheltered from it, nor yet indoctrinated with it—as, I gather, the young are apt to be nowadays by earnest young masters fresh from the Universities, who pore over the writings of Bertrand, third Earl Russell, and are always nearly, but never quite, going off to live in a garrett in the East End of London. . . . It is curious, by the way, that the only other direct contact with political propaganda which befell me at Rugby—and it was entirely accidental this time—should have completed a kind of anticipatory picture of the Labour Party to be. One afternoon in my second or third year a bearded and bareheaded individual with a red tie, a shabby blue suit and a

gold cross dangling on his waistcoat, appeared mysteriously in the Close. He explained wistfully to one or two of us who clustered round him that his name was Stewart Gray and that he was tramping on some not quite intelligible political pilgrimage or other and that, for reasons which he perfectly understood, the head master had declined to provide him with an opportunity of addressing the school. There was a melancholy distinction about him, a blend of crank and saint, a sort of White Knightliness, which I have always found curiously attractive. Ninety per cent. of the Labour Party has always consisted of Will Crookes; honest-to-God trade unionists, committed to no dogma or -ism and only anxious for a squarer deal from society. Ten per cent. are the cranks, the doctrinaires, the crashing bores, the careerists and, occasionally, the saints.

Much more than most current controversy allows, it is not the public schools which make the young but the young who make the public schools. In fact not only the usual charges against public schools but the usual apology for them seem to me equally irrelevant. The familiar defence, of course, is that, whatever their defects, they produce an Empire-building type. Look at the French (one used to say) with their day-schools: they cannot rule an Empire and they are never happy out of France. For a *manly* spirit . . .; but I need not quote further. Passing over such perplexing exceptions as Marshall Lyautey and dismissing any possible comparisons between the ancient nigger-kicking traditions of

John Company and the curious French habit of fraternising with the native, one may ask: Is it the public schools which produce the empire-builder or the empire-builder who produces the public schools? Which is to say, is the System the part-author, or only the symptom, of national character? I have few doubts on this points myself. I was surprised to find when I began to visit Norway that there you have precisely the same empire-building breed (the word "breed," for some reason, is always used in this connection), but no System. The Norwegians, whether fortunately or unfortunately for themselves, have no Empire: in spite of which they explore the Poles, control the perilous whale-fishing industry, pursue adventures all over the world and live in greater numbers outside Norway than within it. In short, though minus an Empire, they are the empire-building breed to a T. No system there, however. On the contrary, free State day-schools where you do not grow up in ignorance of all classes but your own, are not segregated from the opposite sex, tempt no indigent parent to exhaust his scanty capital upon your education and do not become a mere visitor in your parents' home at the age of ten. For the breed is Race not education; Race, as Disraeli pointed out, being all. The breed (if I may be forgiven for sticking to this word) was the breed in the days of Drake, of Clive and of Wellington: at all of which glorious epochs of our history, however, there were, for practical purposes, as I have already remarked, no public schools.

The public school system, in short, is only one

aspect of English character writ small. And personally, with all its minor failings, I like and admire the System just as, with all its minor failings, I like and admire the English character. It is frequently said that the System is a citadel of privilege. Not long ago the controversy was revived in the appropriate setting of a Liberal Summer School. An elementary school education had not prevented the speaker from becoming both a distinguished Cambridge Professor and a successful and widely-advertised journalist, but he expressed the view that life was full of "stalls," reserved for the products of the System. How few Bishops or Judges, he observed, have been educated at Board Schools. Contrary opinions, however, are beginning to be expressed. Not long before Professor Hilton's observations launched a silly-season controversy in *The Times*, a London evening newspaper had roundly asserted that the only professions in which a public school education is now an asset are the Church, motor-car salesmanship, and house to house canvassing for electric carpet-sweepers. The truth is probably somewhere between the Professor and the *Evening Standard*. The Professor may have forgotten that it is not yet long enough since the introduction of free secondary education to judge of its effects upon his reserved stalls. It is at least possible too that not a very high proportion of citizens seriously desire to become bishops or judges. Almost every one, however, desires to become reasonably prosperous. An income of over two thousand a year is indisputably a reserved stall; I wonder how many are occupied by products of the System. It is almost impossible to

tell. The critics complain that so few elementary schoolboys become Cabinet Ministers or Field Marshals. But now that we have an instalment of free secondary education it is highly undesirable that they should. There have surely been enough unintelligent Cabinet Ministers and Field Marshals without recruiting them from the more stupid pupils of the *elementary* schools, the boys who were not bright enough to win scholarships to a secondary school. The trouble with the statistics is that the clever boys from the elementary schools who reach a secondary school and an ancient University are then apt, should they eventually reach a "reserved stall," to figure as privileged University products. In this sense all high station should be reserved for privilege. What is needed is to widen the educational ladder at its lower rungs. At present, as I know, how well, from experience, there are more scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge than there are genuinely able secondary schoolboys—there are plenty of competent ones—to fill them; and, thanks to supplementary State and County scholarships, it is easier for the clever son of a wage-earner to go to an ancient University than for the clever son of a clergyman or small professional man who has been sent, by stern parental economy, to a public school. When the lower avenues are widened the present trickle of brilliant boys from poor homes may widen into a torrent and the Universities, which have changed much since the war, will be rapidly transformed out of recognition. In the meantime, the reservation of stalls is steadily, I fancy, being broken down. Not many of such big business men as

I have met have hailed from the public schools, though they certainly send their sons there. The prejudice of the Common Rooms of Oxford and Cambridge for the public schools has disappeared; here and there, there are even signs of a prejudice against them. A minority only of dons are products of the System themselves. Is it likely that the System can last? The public schools, as we know them, are not a hundred years old. They grew up in the nineteenth century to meet the demands of the new, rich and confident upper middle class. To-day that upper middle class is no longer rich and no longer confident. The rule of the wage-earner has begun. Nobody destroys the citadels of privilege; they crumble, unobserved. The System, it is true, still flourishes. Its genteel social blackmail is potent enough for all ordinary purposes, but it cannot stand up for ever to school bills of £200 per annum, a falling pound and the ever-accumulating taxation of the middle class. In due course British parents will learn of the excellent free schooling which their upper-middle-class counterparts on the Continent enjoy without any social stigma; they will remember that they pay considerable sums annually towards the education of the children of most of their neighbours in premises far more up-to-date than their own children's schools, and as, one after another, the expensive schools become financially rocky and talk is heard of closing down, they will begin to ask themselves why the State should not step in here too. And so, in a sunset of Free Places, the System, as we know it, may well pass away after perhaps not much more than a century of

chequered but energetic life. And once again as of old all classes will carve their names on the same desks. There is no need to be tragic over this prospect. If the System goes—or more probably and more characteristically lives on agelessly under the same name, more or less unrecognisably altered—it will go because the English character has found other modes of self-expression.

### III

#### HERD INSTINCT

BEING of the War generation *par excellence* I find myself wondering as I grow older whether we can really have been just like any other generation of schoolboys and undergraduates. Maeterlinck says somewhere that those who are to die young can always be distinguished. It is almost as if secretly they were themselves aware. And so many of us were to die young. Can the tremendous events, already so near at hand, have produced no dim foreknowledge in any of the victims? There is in the last analysis no time; no past, no future. Thus we all, or almost all, dream habitually of "the future"; only so few of us are trained to remember, or to understand, dreams. But an awareness, gathered thus or otherwise, does somehow sink into the lower levels of consciousness. We do sometimes "feel" great events drawing nearer, as the stream carries us towards them. I believe that my generation was not wholly unvisited by forebodings, formless shadows cast ahead by that which out of all other generations had selected *us*.

At Oxford, not many months before the War, I remember talking to a youth whom I will call Le Mesurier, a slim, dark, bright-eyed creature, sensitive and a trifle mysterious. More than once he had seen ghosts—though, he always said, "seen" was not the

word. You felt them, so to speak. I was asking him about his dreams. Usually he was reticent on this sort of subject but on this particular evening he told me that he had recently had a dream which had disturbed him considerably. He was in a large building, possibly a church, standing among a little group of people, chiefly women, who were all silently examining a tablet on the wall. On the tablet was a long list of names, and the people were peering at these names in the unnaturally dim light. Their lips moved silently, as if spelling them out, but no one spoke. Only every now and again there was a sudden gasp from some woman in the little group as she deciphered a name. Le Mesurier read several names himself. Two of them he remembered. One was a most uncommon name which neither of us had come across before. The other was Brown. Le Mesurier remembered the initials too of both, and the initials of Brown, which were unusual, were those of a Brown who had been at school with him and who also lived in the same country village as he. Then he saw his own name. . . . I suggested that this was a vision of pilgrims a century hence at a tablet commemorating the famous alumni of his school. He shook his head thoughtfully and said that he did not think that either he or Brown were likely to become famous. Something in the way he had told his story made an impression on me, and the names, even the initials, stuck in my head.

It was rather more than two years later that the explanation came to me. I discovered by accident that a corporal in a battalion we met in the trenches

bore the unusual name of Le Mesurier's dream. My curiosity was roused and I took pains to discover his initials. They were the same. I began to think hard. Obviously the corporal had not been at Le Mesurier's school. But then Brown had lived in Le Mesurier's village. Now this was a County Regiment. And—surely Le Mesurier's village had been in that selfsame county? What *was* the village? I had often heard him mention it: it was on the tip of my tongue. (You must remember that war memorials were not the familiar objects then which they have since become. One would be quicker in the uptake now.) I seized the first opportunity of asking an acquaintance in the neighbouring battalion where the corporal's home was. He obviously thought me mad, but a week later I saw him again and he told me. I recognised the name at once: it *was* Le Mesurier's village. There could be no doubt now: Le Mesurier had seen a tablet in his village church, with the names of the village dead. And his own and the corporal's were among them. A few days later I caught sight of the corporal again. He was telling a comic story. It was an eery sensation, like seeing a man jesting over an open grave.

The corporal was taken prisoner with the rest of us, and never returned from captivity. A year or so after the War I made a point of visiting Le Mesurier's village. All three names were on the church wall.

I looked round the platform at the overheated holiday-makers with perfunctory curiosity. My

last Oxford long vacation was well under way. Jack Greany had stayed with us for a month and had departed; we were to meet in a reading-party on the river near Tewkesbury in a few weeks' time. Together we had smoked pipes in our shirt-sleeves far into the night over Plato or Herodotus, the windows open behind us on the blue summer twilight; and we had played tennis and swum in Heath Pool and argued about the nature of Pleasure. And then three of my other Oxford friends had come for a week and we had competed in a two-a-side pentathlon—at golf, rackets, tennis, squash and, oddly enough, at bicycle polo. And now I was seeing them off too. The London train was late, for the August Bank Holiday was in the offing. A hilarious trainload of Territorials, off to their summer camp, had just rumbled through the station. How odd, I thought, fastidiously, that any one should voluntarily spend his holidays perspiring in that unlovely khaki. I looked round the platform at the overheated holiday-makers with perfunctory curiosity. How odd, I thought fastidiously, that any one should voluntarily spend his holidays shepherding irritable children with spades to swarming seaside resorts. However, Plato and pentathlons were not for everybody. I turned to my departing guests.

"Supposing we make this an annual fixture?" I said. Nor was there any apparent reason why we shouldn't. No doubt there had been disquieting news in the papers by then, but we had been reading Plato, not the newspapers. It must have been getting on for the last day on which one couldn't help reading the papers. However it was no special

private information of his own, but merely his normal ironical pessimism which prompted Philip Ledward to make the observation which was afterwards to imprint itself on my memory.

"Perhaps we shall never all four meet again," he said. One says things like that light-heartedly at twenty-one. As it turned out, William Ker was killed in France in 1915. Aubrey de Selincourt and Philip Ledward and I were all wounded, and two of us were prisoners of war. On the whole, according to the averages of our generation, that quartette got off lightly—of the reading-party which was to have met at Tewkesbury I was the only one who lived another two years. All the same, Philip was right; we four never did all meet again. . . .

On August the fourth my father I went to the door into the stableyard to meet the newspapers. In our Hampshire village a man used to bicycle up with them at about ten o'clock and we had seen him some way off across the park. He came in across the cobblestones of the stableyard in bright sunlight, through a patch of shadow near the dovecote and then through sunlight again. The *Daily News* was the first paper I opened. It said WAR. Only two days before it had been asking how England could fight for Russia against Germany, kind, civilised Germany—think in contrast of a Russian village! But now Belgium had been invaded and England had made up its mind. After all we had fought the Spanish Armada, Louis XIV., the French Revolution and Napoleon, all for the same reason—because they had invaded the Low Countries. And if Germany had

shattered by their share in the last and most terrible phases of the War. Even so, the establishment of this particular convention—that the War was hardest on the young—seems to me one of the most surprising achievements of the Post-War era. It was the young, it is true, who died; and the materialist is naturally apt to consider death the supreme and incomparable evil. Yet I doubt very much whether even in Western Europe the vast majority of ordinary humanity genuinely accounts it such. In 1914 I knew much of books but almost nothing of life. Moreover I was a boy and unmarried. The War came as an unwelcome, an alarming, yet, as I realised gradually and with considerable surprise, a curiously exhilarating adventure. I had almost no conception whatever then of what war must mean to parents and to the married. I have now a wife and children myself. And though the thought of taking a personal part in a new war appals me beyond measure—I still dream regularly of the last—I shouldn't have the slightest hesitation, if I had the chance, in preferring active service in another war to seeing my son go off to it. And it would be a selfish choice; I should undoubtedly be choosing the lesser of two horrors. My own parents, who at one stage of the War were to have no certain news of me for six months, probably had a fairly shrewd suspicion already of what they were in for. As for me, I had not the vaguest notion.

In that first week the War still seemed reasonably remote from my personal fortunes. We had no close relations in the professional army. The War would be over by Christmas. I had better try to go

on with my Greats. In the second week it was already obvious that the War was going to extend its tentacles a good deal farther than had seemed likely in those first few days. Greats began to look an increasingly forlorn enterprise. It was in the second week that I visited that army doctor in a queue of would-be recruits. This wasn't a genuine decision on my part yet, for I felt certain that he was going to turn me down on my eyesight. By the end of the third week I had had hurried scrawls from each of my five or six close friends to say that they were joining some battalion or other. In the fourth week I began to make plans to get into the Army myself through the Territorials. I visited a bewildered country doctor and informed him that recruits for the Territorial Forces were allowed to wear spectacles when their eyesight was tested. He didn't ask me for my authority for this categorical statement, which was fortunate, as I had none. But I triumphantly read out the lines of small test print, although, without glasses, I could hardly read the enormous single letter at the top of the card. The doctor signed some form or other with a sigh. It remained to find a battalion, all that was necessary in these bewildered early days being to know somebody who knew its colonel. . . . And so I was in the army. And I suppose that among many conflicting reasons for my being in the Army, the chief was that my friends were. It didn't take long to discover that one couldn't go on reading Greats while one's friends were being shot. This, of course, is what is now known as the herd instinct. For all its present disrepute, I still have my suspicions that

the herd instinct must occasionally be invaluable—to herds, for example. And whatever you may now choose to call the motives which involved the whole of my little world in the War long before the end of 1914, a very high proportion of them, I should say, ought to be ascribed to our old friends, the public schools. It is only natural, therefore, that the public schools should since have shared liberally in the general obloquy of the War itself. Did they not contribute a higher proportion of casualties too than any other section of the community? The eight friends I knew best were all between twenty and twenty-three in 1914. Five of them were killed, the other three were wounded. I suppose that for our particular age group that was a characteristic casualty list. After July, 1914, I never set eyes on any one of those five again. No doubt if they had survived I should have lost touch with some, or most of them, by now. The vicissitudes of approaching middle age would have deprived us of all common interests; we should have found each other irritating or merely dull. But by the accident of our being born in an age in which the young did not easily survive our friendship remains to this day, ageless and unimpaired.

Students of the celebrated herd instinct of 1914 should not too readily assume that this was a merely emotional stampede. None of my friends' letters that August were emotional, or even excited. "It struck me in this way," wrote Jack Greany, "that being fit and demanded one was almost bound to offer oneself. . . . I hate militarism, hate the Army and all its works and all its associations. . . .

So bear out that I have no illusions: I go in bitterly with my eyes open. . . . If I get accepted and am posted to a Scotch Regiment, which is conceivable, I may wear a kilt. How positively ludicrous! . . . After this revelation of the unscrupulous appeal to force, which will go on for ever, it is only right that the aggressor should be treated violently . . . and I believe that England has some ideals and German diplomacy none. What cant it sounds! . . . Do you remember bathing in the mill stream last year, and charades in the glade?" (Being entirely unselfish, as well as extremely able, Jack became the perfect officer, got a D.S.O. in the Dardanelles, for gallantry exceptional even in the early months, when D.S.O.'s were still really hard to get, and was eventually killed on the Tigris, continuing to advance alone a few yards from the enemy trenches, through a sea of mud, when all the rest of the attacking party had been either shot down or forced to retreat by heavy machine-gun fire.) The few letters my friends wrote me from the trenches were equally devoid of emotion or self-dramatisation. What was most noticeable about them was a humorous and self-depreciatory resignation. A good way of describing them would be to say that they were curiously unlike a good deal of the literature which has since been published by conscientious objectors under such titles as "I did not fight"—in which the authors dwell with such lingering, and, one cannot help sometimes feeling, such self-complacent, emphasis upon every detail of their martyrdom, sparing us none of the generous but complicated emotions roused in them when the warder used

strong language or the jam was spread too thin.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly the writers of such notes as reached me from the Dardanelles and the Somme were incomparably less emotional than the lugubrious young gentlemen of Bloomsbury who to-day so constantly bemoan their prospective sufferings in that next world war in which they have been brought up to believe. Nor again were we intoxicated by thoughts of national glory. The gay flags of the South African War were moth-eaten now; poor R. C. with his tuneful patriotism was hopelessly outmoded. What we believed, I should say, was merely that the British way of life was now suddenly threatened with extinction by a ruthless, arrogant and aggressive Prussian militarism. And in this quarrel we were prepared to fight. It was a simple creed, no doubt. Since then a library of learned tomes has explored the convolutions of Pre-War diplomacy, and canvassed *ad nauseam* the rival theses of war guilt—

<sup>1</sup> There were exceptions however. I take the following from the autobiography of a Conscientious Objector: "The conditions here were not so good, but we set to work to improve them by constant agitation. Although the food was excellent, we complained about it, and a speedy increase in the quality and quantity of the rations was effected. There was hardly any work to do, but we objected to it, and the burden of toil—sewing mail bags mostly—was lightened considerably. . . . The restrictions were few. The locks were removed from the cell doors and we could come and go as we thought fit. In the evenings from six till nine-thirty we were free to go out and wander where we liked. At week-ends we went over to Leeds and saw the sights of the city. The work centre was a little world in itself, and a delightful world it was. Many of the men complained bitterly and posed as martyrs. It was fantastic to reflect that, while the flower of the nation was being passed through the hopper of war like the rubbish of the fields, we, who refused to lift a finger in the national cause, were sheltered in this quiet retreat, well housed, well fed, well cared for, and even paid a wage of eight-pence a day—for failing to fight. The thing became farcical, when one thought of papers like the *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian* getting all hot and indignant about our harsh treatment by a brutal Government. . . . And the more we were petted and indulged, the more readily did we exclaim and protest at the ruthless persecution to which we were being subjected. Many of our friends actually believed that we were subjected to unbearable

a singularly fertile theme for argument, since naturally no nation in history has ever *wanted* war; they are merely all determined to obtain their objects, if possible, without war, but nevertheless to obtain them. Nothing that I have read or heard of this literature of war-guilt has caused me to doubt the fundamental rightness of the simple view we took of the matter in 1914. Nor do I personally take much stock in another favourite theory—the virtuous citizen let in for war by the selfishness and incompetence of the wicked politicians. Odd as it may seem, politicians are seldom wicked and incompetent. Even Cabinet Ministers, as far as I have observed them, only differ from the rest of us in being a good deal abler and more hardworking. A country, no doubt, gets the politicians it deserves, and there are certainly some countries which do not seem to have deserved very much. . . . But, though our rulers doubtless made a mess, it was probably not so formidable a mess as we should have made ourselves.

The Territorial battalion in which I now found myself was extremely unmilitary and unexpectedly congenial. A few days before I joined it, its first line had sailed for India. A second line of the battalion had just been formed. The officers' mess consisted of those of the original officers who hadn't gone out—they couldn't send a Territorial overseas in those days, he had to volunteer—and a large admixture of undergraduates and schoolboys. We were high-spirited and willing, but, with not a single regular among us, we couldn't be expected to acquire military polish very rapidly—we still

regarded the Army as a bit of a joke and secretly felt like imposters when beribboned Rifle Brigade sergeant-majors saluted us in the streets of Winchester. By bookish standards we were a surprisingly intelligent lot for an officers' mess. Fortescue had just got his First in Greats at Oxford, Pirie and I already had our Firsts in Mods, Bobbie Durnford had left Eton that July with a scholarship at King's, Scott-Stokes, who was at Winchester till we sailed, had got a New College scholarship, two of the older officers were on the staff of a Training College, and three others were masters at a famous preparatory school outside Winchester. We drilled on Castle Square and marched about the Hampshire lanes and got up shivering at six in the morning to be instructed by the Colonel, who, curiously enough, was a clergyman, in ceremonial sword drill. And I bought a motor-cycle and boxed with the men in my platoon. And in November they asked us to volunteer for India. By finishing our training out there, we should release a regular battalion for France, it was explained. Almost three quarters of the officers and half the men volunteered. The blanks were hurriedly filled up by a recruiting march and a draft from another battalion. We thus became more unmilitary than ever. When we sailed, about a third of the men had never handled a rifle.

I spent my last days before sailing in our Hampshire home. I had crocked the game knee I was always crocking at that time, had got water on it and had been given leave. I had now begun to dread leaving very much indeed. I have always had a complex about going away from home. Going

back to school each term—although I was always extremely happy as soon as I got there—I was more piercingly miserable than I have ever since been, save once perhaps or twice, in adult life. I used to weep passionately and secretly every time, from my first departure for Lockers Park up to my last year at Rugby, when I was head of the school. And now that desolating end of the holidays feeling descended upon me, multiplied a hundredfold. If I hadn't consciously realised that this was the end of the old England and my old life, my profounder instincts knew it all right. When you went back to school you used always to be able to say "only twelve weeks," and you could prepare a calendar to tick off the days. No calendar-ticking now. Who could tell where we should go, or how long it would be, before we saw home again? For some reason I slept in the big south-east bedroom on my last night and my father and my mother and I said a second good-night in dressing-gowns in the corridor outside. I lay awake a good deal that night, and thought wild thoughts of wiring to the adjutant that I was ill, that I must wait till my knee was better (I was still dead lame) and that I hadn't really volunteered for India. We were such a gloriously unmilitary battalion at that time that all this seemed quite possible, at any rate at night. The morning came at last, a golden morning with wisps of mist about the park and the rooks cawing richly in the elms. My parents were to drive me into Winchester after dinner that night; the battalion would leave at dawn next morning for embarkation at Southampton. The last three hours were terrible, a leaden

stupor of despair. And then suddenly, twenty minutes before we were to start, there came a providential surge of unreasoning exultation. The huge family Lanchester came to the door. I said a cheerful good-bye to every one in the house, and to Jock, the Airedale. My parents and I climbed in. I turned once to look at the cheerful square of lamplight in the open doorway, and then the acetylene headlights were boring down the east drive, past the glade, past Hampton's lodge, along the lane past the home farm, along the main road to the right down the hill, past the last of our trees and on over the Roman road to Winchester. They put me down in Edgar Road a few yards from my billet. I stood on the pavement and saluted. Lansley, the chauffeur, saluted from his seat. My parents waved once more and then leaned back silently in the car. I watched it to the end of the road. The red tail-light winked and disappeared. Still on the wings of a strange exhilaration I pushed open the garden gate. In our joint bedroom Bobbie Durnford was sitting on the floor, surrounded by his kit. The new life had begun.

## IV

### EPILOGUE TO EDUCATION

I LEANED back in my deck-chair and lit a cigarette, thus disturbing Jim, the Irish terrier, who was sniffing the evening air distrustfully and every now and again gave a dissatisfied coughing bark. My eye travelled along the mountain tops which ringed us round, and rested appreciatively on Murdar, tallest and grimmest of them all. A child in a compound near-by was chanting some endless and tuneless Indian song, and a jackal howled in the wastes. I sighed contentedly. I had route-marched in the morning and played hockey in the evening; I was tired. Moreover it was early April and summer was obviously at hand. In the stony wastes by the rifle range that morning there had been green grass here and there, and several monstrous new insects. The days were already hot, and this evening one could actually sit out at dinner-time under the mulberry-tree in the garden of the bungalow I shared with Durnford and Wyles, and watch the lights come out in the barracks and the shadows deepen on Murdar, as the bugle sounded for evening across the Seven Streams. Life is good, I thought, for the moment at any rate. And why worry about anything beyond the moment? For I was beginning to learn to live in the present, an art I had hitherto conspicuously lacked. Later I developed it a good

deal further and could turn in at night and drop peacefully off to sleep in the front line trenches as soon as my head touched the ground, though the enemy were within thirty yards and rifle fire was incessant. The power to forget, however, though invaluable, is also dangerous. Years afterwards I was walking with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald from the Athenæum to the House. He was about to leave the Cabinet after eight years of continuous and exacting strain. He was over seventy and he badly needed a holiday. As we passed the saluting policeman at the head of the Duke of York's Steps, he complained that nowadays he occasionally forgot things. "Every now and then," he said sadly, "I think of something that I must say or do, and a moment or two later for the life of me I can't remember what it was." I tried to explain that this sort of thing happened to me, and, as far as I knew, to most of my contemporaries, so constantly that we took it as a matter of course. But I don't think that I convinced Mr. MacDonald. And as we reached the foot of the steps it occurred to me in a flash of unwonted psychological insight that this no doubt was the price which the War generation was having to pay for having once cultivated in self-defence the gentle art of living in the present. The price of war is often tardily exacted. General Dawes, President Hoover's ambassador to London, once told me that his father had suffered a nervous breakdown, admittedly due to his service in the American Civil War, twenty-eight years after it had ended. However, in March, 1915, I was conscious only of the advantages of living in the present. Life, I thought, is good. I am glad I didn't go to

Mess this evening. Often at Quetta I used to stay away from Mess like this, and write letters, or even poetry. Or read Kipling. I had despised Kipling at Balliol, of course. It was impossible, I found, to despise him at Quetta. I had already re-read almost the whole of his prose works, though I still retained enough of my Balliol manner to be able to continue to despise his verse. Spiritually I could see, the whole Officers' Mess was steadily and inevitably becoming Kiplingesque. We had arrived at Quetta railway station, on the first day of the Oxford Hilary Term of 1915, a shambling crowd of civilians in uniform. About a third of the battalion had never marched before and had not the most elementary notion of how to handle a rifle. Their military training had been largely confined to being seasick in the hold of the *Caledonia* and train-sick on the railway journey from Karachi. A considerable proportion of the battalion consisted of boys of seventeen who had been fired with enthusiasm by our recruiting marches. We detrained confusedly. To our consternation, outside Quetta Station waited innumerable regimental bands. They struck up a martial, a highly professional, march. Beyond the bands the inquisitive, coffee-coloured faces of six-foot Pathans were ranked along the glaring white road. The wives of the colonels and majors of the regular garrison peered curiously over garden fences. The march to barracks, if indeed it can be called a march, was not impressive. They called us the babes in arms. But by the end of March we had said good-bye to all that. The regulars had taken us in hand: we could, and now often did, drill like regulars

ourselves. We were brown and lean and many of us were impressively moustached. Every day in every way we became more like characters in Kipling ourselves. There had been a Kiplingesque incident only last night. A Pathan thief had twice invaded the bunk of a sergeant in our lines. Eventually the sergeant woke completely up, chased him, and after a struggle—the intruder had a spiked stick—bashed him on the head with a stone. I went up afterwards with Durnford to the guard-room and the sergeant of the guard opened the prison for us. In the middle of a large, bare, stone floor lay a heap of old sacking. The sergeant stirred it and revealed an awful figure kneeling and quivering on the floor, with matted hair and face covered with blood. . . . Yes, it was difficult not to think in terms of Kipling. For one thing I had never seen soldiers before I came to Quetta. For the soldiers one saw in England, even the regulars, would hardly be called soldiers in comparison with these tall, swaggering, tanned, long-service infantrymen, as thin and as straight as laths. The fierce Pathans in the hills round Quetta had not heard of Balliol or the Poetry Bookshop. For them the British were merely fighting men, and observing the regulars who were our instructors we readily understood why. Insensibly one began to desire to be regarded as a fighting man oneself. One might come out to Quetta a vaguely idealistic Socialist, a contributor of verse to the *Westminster Gazette* and *Poetry and Drama* (O, thrill of those first proofs), a conventional devotee of the literary gods of the day. But in Quetta in 1915 politics had vanished over the horizon. One had no politics,



unless it was a form of politics to be rapidly becoming Kiplingesque. I had been an undergraduate; I now unexpectedly found myself a sahib. Perhaps that was all. As an undergraduate my chief ambition had been to be intelligent: strange and novel preoccupations struggle in the breast of the newfledged sahib. It had become desirable, for one thing, to be punctual and efficient; and, if possible, courageous.

Courage! Perhaps that was at the bottom of all this Kipling business. It is a mysterious quality. In the old days I had been accustomed to hear people assuming, from pulpits and elsewhere, that moral courage is vastly superior to physical courage. I was beginning now to wonder whether conceivably they were wrong, and whether, perhaps, so many people depreciated physical courage merely because so few, so very few, people possess it. On the whole, I was inclined to think, there are two kinds of physical courage. There are the few who are brave always, even in the most unlikely circumstances, on the point of honour. And there are the many who can be brave, given the requisite conditions. A hen will attack a cat in defence of its chickens, and we should most of us perform prodigies of valour in defence of some one or something. But the requisite conditions are seldom forthcoming. The business of the army, therefore, is to create the point of honour. I hoped, not too confidently, that it would be reasonably successful with me. And in this new sahib phase I revived my taste for violent sports and found a novel satisfaction, if not so much actual pleasure, in going over the jumps at the Light

Cavalry riding school without saddle, reins or stirrups, and in having my front teeth loosened, boxing with the expert Romilly of the Somerset Light Infantry. Two years later, when I was a prisoner-of-war, this latter episode may almost be said to have evoked the point of honour itself, by leading to an extraction, without anaesthetic, by a sinister and palpably unqualified Angora Turk in a room six feet square, round the walls of which, all but touching dentist and patient, sat a dozen silent and intently watchful orientals.

I lit another cigarette and stretched out an arm—careful not to disturb Jim, who was still suspicious of Murdar—for *The Shropshire Lad*. For though at Quetta the first dim wraith of politics which had intermittently hovered in my path had been so convincingly dissipated, literature survived the impact of sahibdom. It flinched, indeed, but it scarcely faltered. The inevitable Swinburne, the Gordon Craig, and Galsworthy, the Poetry Bookshop phases might be things of the past, but the inevitable Housman phase had begun. And the occasional cheques which, even in Quetta, I still received from London, were now usually recognitions (and how inadequate!) of exercises in the manner, so infectious yet so elusive, of the Shropshire Lad.

*In Quetta lamps are lighted  
And fainter than in dreams  
The bugles sound for evening  
Across the Seven Streams.*

I turned over the leaves. "*It dawns in Asia,*" I read,

"*tombstones show*" . . . How luscious—and how appropriate! I became aware of a chug-chugging in Gloucester Road. It drew rapidly nearer, and Bill Hammel and his motor-cycle swept up to my mulberry-tree. He too was not dining in Mess, though doubtless not with the object of reading Housman, or even Kipling. Bill Hammel would never need to read Kipling to acquire the Kipling virtues. He had been endowed with them all at birth. I laid *The Shropshire Lad* down on the grass. That scholarly, that unvarying gloom hardly seemed appropriate to Bill Hammel.

"How did your crowd get on at the old boy's inspection?" said Bill.

"Much as usual," I said. "He was an hour late and he only looked at one of the beds—which was entirely and absolutely correct. He said it was like a gipsy encampment."

"Good," said Bill. "Look here, there's a conjurer coming up to your bungalow. I ran into him in the bazaar about an hour ago, so I told him to come up here. Every one else is in Mess or at the Club and I thought you might like to see him. He ought to be here by now."

"Thank you," I said. And as an afterthought, "What do we pay him?"

"Five rupees if he's good, one if he's passable, and a kick on the behind if he's bad," said Bill instantly.

Kipling all over, I thought. Confidence, decisiveness, practical efficiency; Bill *always* knew. And if he didn't, he told you just the same; and you always believed him—he was so confident. Greats at Oxford

taught you that there are two sides to every question, that there are a hundred sides to every question. And that nothing is really true. Or was it—really I was beginning to forget—that everything is really true? Decidedly Greats was not the training for a soldier. "There he comes. We'll make him do his show out here. He won't have so much chance of wangling," said Bill, taking charge of the situation. And while a melancholy individual who looked rather like a *sayce*, in a tight dark coat and a dirty white puggaree, ambled respectfully towards us, Bill summoned Mohammed Hakim, my bearer, from the compound and despatched him for another chair. The conjurer salaamed profoundly.

"You've been damned slow," said Bill.

"Since your honour is ordering me," replied the conjurer sadly, "I am some time going hither and some time going thither."

"He means he couldn't find your bungalow," explained Bill. "Well, jump to it."

To be peremptory, to be brusque; that too was surely Kipling. Was I perhaps rather excessively polite to Indians myself? And certainly it didn't come natural to me to rap out staccato orders, as it did to Bill.

Our melancholy visitor unrolled a rug, squatted down on it, produced a small brown bird out of his bag, and after a few preliminaries turned it abruptly into two birds. This performance he accompanied with a low unintelligible mutter in Urdu, but at the climax—no doubt as a concession to his audience—he unexpectedly ejaculated, "Oh, my God!" Bill laughed explosively. The conjurer looked at him

reproachfully. "I am not wishing to say funny things," he remarked sadly. "Get on with it," said Bill sternly. "And don't let's have any snakes. I loathe snakes."

"No snakes, no mouse, no rabbit," replied the conjurer obediently.

I thought it rather a pity that there were to be no snakes myself. I had always associated Indian conjurers with snakes. However, Bill was obviously in charge. After this the conjurer did a succession of the sort of tricks which may be seen at children's parties at Christmas in England. He still kept up an unintelligible patter in Urdu, but at each crisis he now ejaculated, "No snake, no mouse, no rabbit." Bill began to get restless; I fancy he had an idea that the conjurer was not being respectful to him. Then came the Mango trick. The man planted a seed in a pot, covered it, removed the cover, and showed a sprouting stalk. Whenever he removed the cover again the plant had grown surprisingly. Bill got up with a yawn.

"False tops of course," he said.

I didn't quite see what he meant myself, but then I never have been able to see through even the simplest trick. Bill said he thought after all he would run down to the club. He mounted his machine and waved a cheery farewell. The chug-chugging became a speedy diminuendo down Gloucester, down Stewart, Road. The conjurer had collected his belongings and was standing respectfully under the mulberry tree.

"Thank you," I said. I gave him five rupees.

The performance certainly hadn't been what Bill

would have called good. On the whole, for Indian conjuring, it had been distinctly too like a children's matinee at Maskelyne and Devant's. But I had a suspicion that this might have had something to do with Bill. The conjurer salaamed excessively.

"Thank you, sahib," he said. "The other sahib would not be giving five rupee. Not one rupee. He would be kicking."

I was slightly startled. He had certainly hit on Bill's tariff with surprising accuracy.

"If the sahib please, I am doing one more trick."

The man squatted down again, scraped together some heaps of dust and peered intently at them. Occasionally he patted them or moved them about or traced mysterious lines in them with his finger. Then he spoke slowly, without looking up.

"The sahib will soon meet the dark sahib four days' journey from the inland sea. It is five years since the sahib was told this."

He stood up, salaamed once more, and departed swiftly without a word.

Traditionally His Majesty's army moves in a mysterious way its wonders to perform. Nevertheless I am exceedingly grateful for the education it vouchsafed me in Quetta and I perceive now that army training is not so fortuitous as it seemed to us at the time. It is based, I realise, upon much the same principles as an Oxford education. At Oxford young men are not taught how to be accountants, auditors or engineers; nor is there a School of Leather Tanning at Oxford. And from time to time, in consequence, the parents of undergraduates

complain angrily in the Press that their sons have been taught nothing at the university which can possibly be of use to them in their subsequent careers. But Oxford remains unruffled. It knows better. It has not tried to teach them how to be accountants or engineers, or tanners of leather: it has tried to teach them how to use their minds; in a word it has educated them. And the educated man, that is our theory, does *anything* better than the uneducated. In its own way the army appeared to follow the same principles. Thus, when, in billets in Winchester, we were supposed to be training for trench warfare in France, we learnt ceremonial sword drill, how to march past a saluting base, and how to attack by alternate rushes in the open. At Quetta, from which I was destined to be sent to Mesopotamia, the flattest country in the world, they taught me the art of mountain warfare. This is surely the Oxford principle of the General education at its most courageous. We were not being trained to be experts; they were making us soldiers.

I enjoyed it all enormously. For one thing, the relief from having to think—they had really tried to make us think at Oxford—was most refreshing! Indeed, once one had learnt to live for the moment there were no troubles left. One bombinated in the most agreeable vacuum. The remote and irrecoverable past drifted far astern; the future one deliberately forgot. Only from time to time news of the death of a friend in France impinged upon this simple, Spartan paradise. And even this, though it would keep me awake at nights, seemed to reach one somehow muffled and assuaged, a faint echo

from some remote and fabulous clime. And meanwhile there were congenial companions—for my fellow-officers, though, like me, they may have been steadily going Kipling, never became too military for comfort; there was constant exertion in the open air; and above all, perhaps, there was the agreeable sensation of being educated. For, make no mistake, I was being educated. All the most glaring lacunæ in my civilian education were being repaired; had I been a somewhat apter pupil they might even have been permanently repaired. There is a lot to be said for a year in the peace-time army as a sequel to a bookish education. To take your platoon out as advance guard for a battalion in the hills; to climb at top speed and descend precipitously over loose stones and shifting boulders at the double; to select a crest which will command a stretch of valley beyond the pickets, and yet not lose touch with them, while at the same time blocking all the side gullies and valleys; to rest, between scrambles, in a rocky fastness with an endless view over summit beyond pyramidical summit of the eternal and untenanted hills, wreathed, in the hot sunlight of early morning, in thin veils of smoke-grey mist; to march men at night through rock-strewn wastes on a compass-bearing; to drill, pay, feed and doctor them—doubtless this might not have been an education without Plato as prelude, but is it not possible that even Plato would not have been an education without this as epilogue? Is it not possible that Plato, that any merely bookish education, leaves one with a propensity, like Lenin and the intellectuals, to see the world as a series of literary abstractions? Not

much harm, if in the cloisters scholarship-boy and professor remain idealogues. But nowadays when, as every correspondence column proves, scholarship-boys and Professors have all turned volunteer-politician, it would be as well for them to learn more than books or cloisters will ever teach them. Yes, I am grateful to Quetta. For coming back, after riding in the Cavalry School, to a late breakfast of a dozen peaches, picked warm off the trees in the Mess garden, and half a dozen cups of chocolate; for Woodcock Spinney where the grass is greener and longer than grass is and the trees were like more ethereal silver birches, and one signpost said, "Beware of snakes," and another, "This road is undermined;" for my birthday dinner at the club, from which Bobbie Durnford and Goddard and I were driven back by a *tum-tum wallah*, whose horse would only move in the direction of its stables, so that the driver decided to humour it and allowed it to do an about-turn and himself ran with curious raking strides beside it, as it went at a hand-gallop up many a strange lane and long, irrelevant, moonlit road, the owner always trusting to coax the animal at the corner on to some tack which would bring us ever so slightly nearer to our ultimate goal, and Bobbie Durnford with arms passionately outflung exhorted, "*Juldi karo, O Juldi, Juldi karo,*" while I climbed from front to back of the rickety concern and exclaimed continually, "*Ne tik bandobast,*" and Goddard laughed deeply from behind, and eventually Bobbie and I drove the animal simultaneously and overtook a private gharri with mingled cries of, "Going up, Balliol," and, "Well rowed, College."

For *The Tiger*, the battalion magazine which I founded and edited; for long nocturnal discussions with the sceptical Goddard on poetry, God and the colonel; for the holiday expedition of six of us to Chaman on the Afghan frontier, where the railway on to Kandahar lies stacked, against emergencies, and one sees the mountains stand up out of the misty plain of Afghanistan like cardboard models on a stage. Here Afghan bandits raided the station as we incautiously slept on the platform in the summer heat, and stole all our belongings from the railway carriage beside us, so that we were left with little more than the pyjamas we stood up in.

We wired to the Mess at Quetta, "Meet train with four *topis*, five sets underclothes, four jackets, four trousers," and were greeted on return by fifteen fellow officers with cameras, an impromptu band and a highly unsuitable assortment of garments, of which my share was a pair of evening dress trousers, a striped cricket blazer and an opera hat. For the wind blowing like a knife-edge off Murdar in January and the sun like a hammer-blow in June, and the long hours in cold or heat, drilling, shooting or marching in those glaring, stony, mountain-ringed wastes. I am grateful too, for the nine months' training of wind and limb without which I should certainly not have survived the experiences which were still in store for me, and for membership of a cheerful and friendly society in which nobody was trying to display intellectual brilliance or to achieve notoriety or to outdo his colleagues.

But, as far as I was concerned, perhaps the battalion's most brilliant stroke was selecting me as

transport officer. I who had never been able to wrap up a parcel tidily, I for whom, in kindness or self-protection, relatives or domestics had always packed when I left home on the shortest visits, was detailed for a course of professional instruction which should fit me to take charge of the baggage of an entire battalion, and of the various alarming animals which, in the orient, are employed to transport it. I got a transport certificate, but I doubt whether I should have made a very efficient transport officer. This did not matter much, however, since I never had to try, being despatched, almost as soon as I had passed my examination, on active service in a series of operations in which, as it happened, there was no transport. It was all part of the great army principle of giving you an elaborate training in as many as possible of the duties you would never have to perform. I learned a great deal about how much *bhusa* you give a mule and how much a camel, how to treat galls, and how to load ammunition boxes, and I was kicked on the thigh by a mule and all but bitten by a camel. All of which painfully acquired knowledge has long since passed from me, leaving not a wrack behind—save only my continued ability to tie the transport knot, the magic knot which can never come undone. How useful, I used to think, this will be in civilian life! And I would picture myself, who had always been so noticeably ineffective with string, thrusting aside the Boy Scouts with a competent "Let me show you how we used to do it in the army." I have been disappointed since to find out how curiously seldom the exigencies of civilian life do in fact seem to call for knowledge of

the transport knot. Perhaps it is because one so seldom carries one's baggage on mules. Nevertheless I am grateful to the army for causing me to become, on paper at anyrate, a qualified transport officer. And I remember with gratitude how I rode out with the Transport Column to the brigade camp at Gulistan and experienced a mild but profitable foretaste of those discomforts of the desert, about which I was soon to learn so much, so very much, more.

"Five o'clock, sir," said some one invisible, on that September the eleventh, and I woke slowly on a camp-bed beneath the stars, with the taste of sleep in my mouth. It was very cold and very dark, and close at hand was the faint, high screaming and snorting of many mules. For a moment there passed through my head an inconsequent memory of Oxford, and of being called at half-past eight, and again at half-past nine and at ten. I rose with somewhat conscious heroism. . . . After a shivering and hurried toilet, plunged ear-deep in a capacious British warm, I stumbled away through the cold starlight past long lines of unseen mules to a *tonga* by which a few officers of the battery which accompanied us were gulping cups of tea and hard-boiled eggs. Behind them could be dimly seen a group of patient Indian bearers.

The major in command of the battery loomed up, a perpetually cheerful gentleman with a monocle. "There's another damned mule off," he remarked genially. A thud of hoofs was audible, and a confused shouting in Hindustani. But, strange though it appears, mules are always caught. . . .

By now there was an orange flush along the

eastern line of the hills, and soon the column was moving. First a small escort of Indian infantry, then the battery with the major at its head on foot, humming a tune; he never rode a horse on the march, and nothing had yet been known to tire him. Last, the three hundred pack mules with their slouching *drabis* and a small, fortuitous escort of British infantry. Nominally, though a pupil, I was in charge of the transport mules, of whose hoofs I was still slightly respectful. Fortunately, my mentor, an imperturbable British Transport sergeant with an enviable command of profanities, rode cheerfully at my side.

The sun came up over the hills ahead, the cloud of dust in which the column moved was glorified into a cloud of fire, and a *drabi* and his mules on a rise in front were silhouetted dead black against a curtain of flame. As the cool sun crept up, shining full on the hills behind the column, they turned from twilit grey to muddy brown, looking like indiscriminate sand castles abandoned long ago by some gigantic child.

I discarded my British warm as the column passed a mysterious line of forts, deserted of man, but apparently in good repair and placarded here and there with ludicrously spruce notice-boards. Up the pass the column begins to straggle. The day is still cool, but the pace of a mountain battery mule is four miles an hour, and the pace of a pack-mule is only three. Also, despite the transport knot, the loads come off a transport mule with mysterious frequency and its *drabi* has to draw to the side of the road while the column passes, until some member of the scanty

baggage-guard will hoist the fallen load for him.

The heat does not begin until the column is over the pass. Then it comes suddenly, like a stab in the back, for the sun by now is dead behind us. Orders come back that the transport will not attempt to keep up with the battery; it will close up at the hour's halt four miles ahead. Those four miles are unpleasant; my eyes shut repeatedly, and I nearly come off my horse as it starts suddenly at an escaped mule clattering past with half its load trailing desperately behind it. A *drabi* begins to chant a wailing and unintelligible dirge. Unlike ourselves, Indians do not sing until they are tired.

At last the battery is seen halted ahead, the mules spread out along the side of the track, the loads are off, and the *drabis* lie down in the scanty shadow of their beasts, winding their puggarees round their faces. The British gunners cluster behind an ambulance *tonga*, the transport sergeant goes off to see if the battery sergeants' mess has a cup of tea for him, and I join the gunner officers in front, encountering *en route* my own bearer, Mahommed Hakim, a sad-eyed plutocrat with a bicycle, who is being rebuked by the battery captain, who had found him asleep by the track two miles ahead of the column; which is unwise when you are not a day's march from Afghanistan, on a road on which throats have been often cut.

A ragged shrub of wild thyme casts a patch of shade rather larger than a melon. The major, to whom this place is offered, refuses it at once on principle, and seats himself carefully in the full glare of the sun, humming a tune. It is difficult to eat

with relish in considerable heat, even where there are no flies. . . . Returning towards the ceaselessly flicking tails of the mules, I found a water-melon, thoughtfully stowed away for me by Mohammed Hakim in a cart, and presented it to a group of grateful and perspiring gunners.

Soon the column is off again. Again the battery draws slowly ahead in its own cloud of dust. Wearily the mules jog over the endless level—mere interminable rubble, broken only by the distant mountains, and here and there by the huge white pillar of a dust-storm, stalking slowly far away over the plain, and resembling, when it first rises, the burst of a distant shell, and then, as it gathers height, a *djin* of the Arabian Nights. Three miles, four, five jog away; my lips are cracked and painful and the buttons of my tunic too hot to touch. The mules have started too early for their morning water (which they decline fastidiously in the cold), and begin to flag. Another mile and one falls suddenly in the road; then another. Nothing, it seems, will get them up again. Both ambulance *tongas* are well filled already—with Indians at present, whom the sun has taken in the belly. Still the forefront of the battery can be seen ahead, winding interminably on and on. The insidious rumour comes down the line, “We are on the wrong track.” If so, where will water be found? And without water there cannot be a final halt. My transport sergeant gallops off and plunges into fierce objurgation of an Indian soldier who has passed by a fallen load. The soldier protests angrily that he is not a coolie; the sergeant replies unanswerably that he is a servant of the Government

and drags him back. Another two miles and still no sign of a halt at the head, which must be nearly four miles away by now and is only occasionally visible through the dust. A British soldier who lies stretched out by the roadside like a log, head on arms, is removed to the *tonga*. Still the dust and the sun, and the distant battery still moving. It is well past the expected hour of arrival, and Sergeant Bennett points out that the rear of the column is out of sight altogether. From front to rear must be a good six miles. The *naiks* and *kôt-duffadars* of the mule corps put exhausted *drabis* on their mules and horses, and one sturdy *naik* is trudging on foot, leading twelve mules. Some of the Indian recruits are disposed to be tearful, and one foot-sore youngster sits down and weeps resonantly as his load falls for the fourth time. Indians will go all day without food, but water they must have—water however dirty. The brackish supply they brought from the last bivouac is gone, and there are no water *packawls* on the mules, for, according to the map, water should have been reached long ago.

It is five o'clock—eleven hours already on the road—when we sight a broad hollow, with a river, a real river, running through it. The *drabis* stagger forward greedily over the broad self-encrusted flat. One collapses dramatically within twenty yards of the water. "Let me alone, sahib," he says faintly to a passing gunner who attempts vaguely to assist.

I walk back up the rise from the river flats and along the deep dust of the abhorred track. The stragglers are beyond sight in the distance. Two Indian sepoy's plod wearily up, and espying my

water-bottle, one falls suddenly on his knees. "*Pani, sahib; pani.*" I pour out a slender stream into the hollowed palms, wondering vaguely what caste would say to this, and attempt to explain that there is a big river down in the hollow there. The men nod unintelligently and plod off. A few scattered transport units go by at longish intervals. Four carts have gone back for stragglers, and in due time bring in their harvest. I trudge back and across the river to the bivouac beyond.

Slowly the sun sinks towards the eternal and indifferent hills, and with the fall of twilight they grow remote and grey, with one clear, early star yellow above them. The indomitable major has gone along the river-bed with a gun and returned empty handed. The whistle blows for the mules' feed, and the lines are a pandemonium of screams and snorts and whinnying brays. The animals are inspected for galls and other ills, and now and again roll contentedly in the dust. Twilight deepens quickly through starlit dusk to darkness. The *drabis*—their last man in by now—croon softly to themselves and cook *chupatties* over glowing embers. Thoughtfully the mules snuff at their *bhusa*, and a slender moon rises towards Afghanistan.

On September 30th, 1915, we heard that our battalion was to send two hundred and fifty men and six officers, to embark at Karachi for the Persian Gulf on October 15th. Our first line, the battalion which had preceded us to India from Winchester, had gone out early in the year. At intervals ever since there had been rumours that we were to reinforce

them, but this was the real thing at last. I decided at once that I must be one of the six. At lunch I persuaded a fellow-subaltern to take over a Transport job which would have kept me away from Quetta for the next two days. I wanted to be on the spot so that I could pull strings. In Mess that evening I asked the colonel to let me go. He listened inscrutably, but made no promises. Now that the time had come I was surprised at my own eagerness. Going out with a draft wouldn't be so pleasant as going with the whole battalion—which would have meant keeping one's own platoon intact—and this volunteering business was never so agreeable as just being ordered off with no act of volition of one's own to make. I didn't in the least look forward to Mesopotamia either; I merely wanted to go. My friends from Crowthorne, Rugby and Oxford were now on active service or already killed; even more obviously than in 1914 this was an affair which one couldn't be left out of any longer. And what we then knew of the campaign in Mesopotamia, which wasn't very much, led us to suppose that it was really a soft option, a sort of belated South African War. Strange as it now seems, it was even spoken of as quite a gentlemanly affair. If this was all fate demanded of one, one ought surely to be grateful. Two days later the names of the selected officers were announced, and mine was one of them. Almost all my platoon had volunteered too, though a good many were afterwards rejected for bad teeth. There remained the business of getting past the doctor myself. My eyesight, I knew, would plough me instantly in any orthodox test; and it was a regular

R.A.M.C. man I had to get past this time. However, all went smoothly. I passed the medical test as a matter of course; the medico hadn't got a sight-testing card by him—he naturally assumed that the eyes of any one who had been passed into the army less than a year back would still be up to standard.

"How many lines of the card did you read when they let you in?" he asked.

"Five or six," I said, quite truthfully; not adding that I had worn glasses. And so the last obstacle was surmounted, and there was still a week before we were to leave. It was now the still, clear gold of a fine English autumn, and I found that I was quite fond of Quetta. The officers of the draft went about buying kit and gadgets in the bazaar and being stood drinks and dinners; I, for my part, with the familiar sense of apprehensive exhilaration one used to feel before an important football match at school. I wrote a long, explanatory letter to my parents. Whatever happened, it was they, who had no part in making it, who would suffer most from my decision.

It seems to me rather odd now that I shouldn't have *worried*, shouldn't have worried in the least, should have been, in fact, so much less conscious of the possibilities of misadventure ahead of me than I should be nowadays before a family expedition to Norway. I suppose this is one of the chief differences between youth and maturity. It is certainly one of the differences which make war, despite the contrary convention, so much harder on the older generation. Also I had my curious inner confidence. Almost as far back as I can remember, certainly from the days

when I used to hold my breath and listen until for a moment time stood still, I had been aware that time is an illusion. And later on, when I read Kant, it did not seem to me strange, it seemed the merest matter of course, that philosophers should hold that time possesses no objective reality, that it is a mere creature of the mind of man. Nor later still, did I find anything startling about Mr. J. W. Dunne's fascinating *Experiment with Time*, with its evidence that we all regularly dream of the future; have I not a relative who repeatedly says, "I was waiting for you to do that. I have dreamed it all before"? I do not go in for dreams myself, but more than once I have been secretly aware, at a distance of several years, that certain events, fantastically improbable events, would happen to me. Only one must never speak of the things of which one has this secret confidence, for then the spell departs. *In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. Fide quam fortuna*,<sup>1</sup> when the Elton family motto was first coined, for all I know, it was intended to mean "By the Faith rather than by wealth," which was probably appropriate enough for a race of God-fearing Englishmen, of whom, as far as I know, only one,

<sup>1</sup> It may seem strange, in view of the interest I have always taken in our family motto, that under my name in such works of reference as concern themselves with arms and mottoes, will be found a lacuna and the note "arms not exemplified at the time of going to press." This is due purely to my own pig-headedness. The College of Heralds quite properly considers an Elton of the reign of Charles II., who approximates unconventionally to the age of his own father, to be a weak link in my otherwise impeccable descent from the Elton who owned the arms at the Visitation in the reign of Elizabeth. Officially I must take the arms out again for myself. In a spirit of mere obstinacy I haven't done so. My forebears have certainly used the crest for at least a hundred and fifty years, as their silver shows. The arms have been in a cartouche on the wall of Sir Ambrose Elton's house, Clevedon Court, since somewhere about 1720. But the Clevedon Eltons have never had the descent recognised and they have never taken the arms out again for themselves.

my great great-grandfather, William Elton, ever showed any signs of amassing wealth; and of him it is recorded that "had he lived in less princely fashion he would have died worth a whole instead of a quarter of a million of money." My private translation, however—of which the Latin is surely equally susceptible—has always been, "By faith rather than chance." This does not mean of course that you wait fatalistically for the event. You have to do your damndest to bring it about—often by private self-discipline rather than by effort in the outer world of events—and you have to have complete faith that it will happen. And when these two forces have been set to work, a third, from without, co-operates; and it *does* happen. From the very beginning of the war I had been confident that I was not going to be killed. I did nothing in particular to ensure this; nor did my intuition prevent my being extremely frightened at intervals. It was not a confidence which could stand up to the extremer mental agonies of warfare, but it did, I think, amount to a persistent mental background which at times became an inner tranquillity upon which I unconsciously drew.

## BULLETS AND HUNGER

THE battalion we joined at Amara on the Tigris, doing garrison duty on the lines of communication, was much more military. This is not intended to be a reflection on the second line at Quetta. At Quetta, before I left, we could drill and march like regulars. And afterwards the second line covered itself with glory in Palestine and France. For all practical purposes the second line was at least as good as the first. All the same, it definitely wasn't so military. The officers of the first line—a good many of them had come with drafts from other Hampshire battalions—were mostly pre-war Territorials. Many of them would probably have liked to be regulars, which few of the second line would. At Quetta, though military manners were rubbed into us, and we all stood up when the colonel came into Mess, said "Good-morning, sir," and saluted the first time we met a major every morning, and sprang smartly to attention whenever springing smartly to attention was desirable, the fact remained that there wasn't a military *atmosphere* about us. The subalterns, at anyrate, were too Sixth Form and University not to retain the ingrained civilian characteristic of tolerating, and even encouraging, individual idiosyncrasies. One could even occasionally make the sort of jokes that used to be made at Balliol without being thought

a damned young puppy. The officers for the most part did not come from Universities and Sixth Forms and they did not care much about idiosyncrasies. At school I had never myself encountered that all-pervasive pressure on the individual to be *like*, that artless concentration on simple physical interests, which one is always reading about. But at Amara there certainly did seem to be something of the sort. No doubt homogeneity is a military virtue—certainly these were very effective soldiers. But I must admit that I found it rather uncomfortable at first. Also I had had to leave most of my own platoon when we left Quetta, and as soon as we got to Amara I was at once parted from my new platoon, to which I had already become attached. These repeated separations from the men you had got to know were a side-line, so to speak, of the great army principle of training you for what you would never have to do. As Robert Palmer observed when I told him that I had asked to go with my men into A Company, that was the one company I could be certain that I should not be appointed to.

Robert Palmer was a most surprising person to encounter in that galley. A year before I went up to Balliol I was taken, full of respectful awe, to listen to a debate from the visitors' gallery at the Oxford Union. G. R. Isaacs, now Marquis of Reading, who had been one of my elders at Rugby, was moving some Liberal motion or other, and he was supported, I remember, by two other Rugbeian Presidents of the Union, Philip Guedalla and the eldest Micklem. In the chair was the grave figure of the new President, Robert Palmer. He was a younger son of the Lord

Selborne who had taken office that summer in the new Coalition Government of 1915, and he was a deeply religious Conservative, who had got a First in Greats and held advanced views on social reform. He had been anxious to go on active service because a Christian, he said, ought always to take the line of most resistance, and also because he wanted to "mother" his men, as he called it, and he believed that if they were properly looked after there needn't be anything like so many deaths from disease. His solicitude for his men reminded me often of Jack Greany and myself brooding over the good of the House at Whitelaw's. He took endless trouble over them and always gave them the greater part of any luxuries which reached him in parcels from home. In India he used to give them straight talks on clean living. Good Friday, Easter and Christmas were still far more real and exciting for him than anything that happened in Mesopotamia. In his spare time at Amara he was reading *The Origin of Species*, Gibbon, Adam Smith, Bacon, Borrow, Burke's *French Revolution*, Balfour's *Theism and Humanism*, innumerable poets and a history of the Church of England, besides writing, I believe, a novel of his own. And he still pondered over slums and the future of India and venereal disease. He was profoundly bored by army ritual, though he was consistently punctilious about his duties. Balfour's *Theism and Humanism* he lent me, I remember, and in the evenings I read it alternately with *Esmond* on the camp-bed on the flat roof of our Arab house. It was startling and refreshing, amid the hearty Philistinism of the Amara Mess, to encounter this grave and spiritually-minded

philosopher, so quiet, so humorous, so courteously reserved, so capable both of making a well-liked and level-headed officer and of putting his gaiters on the wrong way round. By blood he was half a Cecil, and it needed scarcely any effort of the imagination to see him as an elder statesman. He was not, however, the sort of person who was likely to survive the war, and he was killed three months later at Umm-el-Hannah. Like Jack Greany, who in many ways so curiously resembled him, he was the only officer, in some pre-doomed assault, who actually penetrated the enemy's trenches. Others of his Oxford generation have come, with Rupert Brooke, to symbolise in public memory the war waste of brilliant youth, but I doubt myself whether any of them was so likely to have made an impact on his time as Palmer.

Amara—where, to the disgust of our draft, which thought it had said good-bye to all that, we sweated and did close order drill and played hockey, for all the world as if we were still at Quetta—must have been a remarkable place. It was a town of about ten thousand inhabitants, with a mile-long quay on the left bank of the Tigris, and among its motley population, besides the predominant Arab Mussulman of both Sunni and Shia sects, besides Jews and Armenians and the Sikhs and Hindus of the Indian Army, it housed Nestorian, Jacobite, Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Christians. Huddled around the Mess in which we chatted of war, ball-games and field-sports, was a microcosm of the Early Church, a whole chapter of Gibbon—a chapter, alas! which I did not read. I wish I had made some contacts with that richly variegated population during our month

in Amara. But the army carries Aldershot with it wherever it goes, and at Amara the invisible barriers were as ubiquitous as at Quetta. And I was too busy adapting myself to Aldershot to have much time to break spiritual bounds into the mysterious continent in which our little island of Anglo-Saxondom had deposited itself. Even at Quetta, apart from my bearer and that conjurer and a native officer at the 28th Light Infantry riding school, the only Indians I can be said to have conversed with were the melancholy gold-spectacled gentleman who helped me to get our battalion Journal printed, and the *munshi*, Sher Ali, who tried to teach me Urdu. The Territorials, Sher Ali told me, had been a great surprise to the Indians at Quetta. When they had heard that Territorials were coming, they had thought, "These will be shopkeepers." To their astonishment, they found that we were polite. We did not kick Indian servants or call shopkeepers Sons of Pigs. They concluded, he said, that we, rather than the regulars, were the real sahibs. "For example," Sher Ali concluded rather disconcertingly, "if you were a regular you would have made me take my shoes off before I came in." I looked under the table. Certainly his shoes were on. I wondered whether perhaps after all I ought to have insisted on his taking them off. However, I felt sure that I should never call him a *Sua ka batcha*.

When I was not on parade, or mounting guards, or in the Mess, or strolling along the waterfront, or sleeping under the stars and a mosquito net on our flat roof, or reading, or censoring the men's letters home (astonishingly literary, some of them), or

writing home myself, I played Patience. How many thousands of games of Miss Milligan was I not destined to play during the next three years! Patience is the sovereign soother of nerves. It occupies the mind without demanding concentration. You can, if you please, take omens from your results. I fancy that it was Dick Lacy who taught me Miss Milligan. Dick, who was one of our original first line, was another unexpected feature of the Amara Mess. He was nearly twenty-one but looked a good deal younger. He was completely unlike Robert Palmer; yet, like Palmer, he obviously lived a private life of his own in our Aldershot-overseas. Both of them, if you believe in "types," may be conceded to have been public school types. That is to say, beneath their well-marked individual idiosyncrasies, there was a substratum of qualities which any one who knew the System must have recognised. Not that they were the same qualities. Palmer, if you like, was the conscientious prefect, perpetually anxious for his erratic flock. Nor was it only the troubles of his immediate flock at Amara which exercised him so deeply; heredity and upbringing combined to make it inevitable that he should feel responsible, almost before he had grown up, for the troubles of the world itself. Dick, on the other hand, had not been a prefect at Bradfield. He enjoyed life without worrying over its meaning, or its defects. He was a well-disciplined subaltern, but in private still found it as difficult to take military authorities seriously as does the Fifth Form not to draw caricatures of its ushers. He was thoughtful for his platoon, not because he had a highly developed sense of responsibility, but because

he was naturally kind, had indeed, in spite of his gallantry, a streak of almost feminine sensitiveness—in the old days he could arrange flowers and had an eye for ladies' dresses. One morning a few weeks later I was walking down Dick's section of the front line in Kut just after one of his men had been shot through the head; the doctor hadn't arrived and Dick was bending over the man, mechanically stroking his shoulder, with a strange look of horrified tenderness on his face which I shall always remember. In comparison with some of our seniors, who were almost excessively manly, Dick seemed almost girlish; but when our real hardships began, no one took them with such consistent gaiety as he. Dick, I realise now, was exceedingly good for me; in his company one couldn't take oneself too seriously. I began to shed, for the time being at anyrate, the last vestige of Dr. Arnold's *praeceptor*. At Amara we talked about mutual acquaintances at home—he came from a neighbouring village, but curiously enough we had never met in England—and about our elders and betters in the battalion. "I don't think I like him," Dick would say. "He hasn't got any manners." "I know, but he can give an order. I must say I admire the way he says 'Go and inspect that kit.' I always find it so damned hard myself not to say, 'You might go and inspect it,' or 'Go and inspect it, would you?'" "Yes, that's splendid," Dick would say, "but I don't think I like him. He hasn't any manners." And I would soon abandon the more military criterion myself.

And then one day orders came for us to celebrate the victory of Ctesiphon. The garrison paraded and

the Volunteer Battery prepared to fire a salute. Something went wrong and the salvo of triumph degenerated into a series of feeble plops and whirrings. It was an omen. There had been no victory of Ctesiphon. The army was falling back. Next day two of our companies were ordered up-river to Kut-el-Amara.

All young soldiers, I imagine, wonder secretly what it will feel like to be under fire. My own initiation was pleasantly gradual—definitely South African, not Great War. We had nosed up the Tigris in one of the flat-bottomed river steamers, and for the first time, as we put into Kut and some one from the river bank answered shouted inquiries about the casualties at Ctesiphon, we had realised the full dimensions of the disaster. Without ordering him to remain on the defensive, the Indian Government, incompetent to the last, had refused Townshend the troops he needed for an attack. He had driven off the Turks, but lost so many men in doing it that he had been forced to retreat himself. Strengthened by unsuspected reserves, the enemy had turned and was now pursuing him across the miles of arid billiard-table which lay between Ctesiphon and Kut-el-Amara. At Kut presently Townshend would make a stand. It lay in a defensible loop of the Tigris, at its junction with the tributary Shat-el-Hai. Lodged there, the remnants of the Sixth Division could hold up any further Turkish advance, while reinforcements—ten times as many now as would have ensured a victory at Ctesiphon—were cumbrously assembled in the south. These too, as might have

been expected, the Indian Government would not send in sufficient numbers until it was too late. All this, however, fortunately lay well beyond our present horizon. All that mattered at the moment was that, until the retreating army arrived, there was no garrison in Kut and that Arab irregulars in unknown numbers were supposed to be closing in on it. Our two companies bivouacked beyond the town and its orange groves, behind the thin line of block houses which faced the darkening desert. Somewhere out there in the gathering twilight beyond, the distant Sixth Division was fighting its way back to us. A couple of hundred yards ahead, loomed the dim shape of the nearest block-house. From the darkness of the empty plains beyond came a ceaseless murmur—the flow of the Tigris and the rustle of the wind in the dead grass of the desert. We peered out into the cavernous night and speculated as to what it concealed. The thousands of Arabs who were said to be marching in on us from the east would find our two companies and a few hundred Indians between them and Kut. Shots from a block-house were to be the signal that they had arrived. Dick and Jock Pirie and I talked late that night, excitedly aware that at any moment our conversation might be punctuated by that significant fusillade. But the night had passed without misadventure, and now it was only a handful of Arabs sniping from a village on the right bank. The adjutant told me to take some men and get rid of them. This only meant going down to our bank of the river and opening rapid fire. All the same, as I went crouching, with a single file at my heels, down a sort of shallow ditch to a suitable

vantage-point, I realised, with an almost agreeable excitement, that the bullets which were whistling across the turbid yellow Tigris, were aimed at *me*.

The Sixth Division was now said to be within a day's march. The army commander, Sir John Nixon, had already arrived, gone on by steamer for Amara, been heavily sniped by Arabs from the bank, put back to Kut and taken off one of our two companies to escort him downstream. Jock Pirie, that philosophic Scottish second-lieutenant from Oxford and Quetta, had gone with it; but Dick Lacy remained, and that evening he was sent out into the desert with his platoon and a long string of mule carts to discover and, if possible, assist, the retreating army. He waved gaily as he set out beside the jangling mule-carts across that portentous landscape; the rifle of a sniper cracked occasionally from across the Tigris. It was Dick's twenty-first birthday. . . . The army began to trail wearily in next day, and naturally new varieties of first experience followed hard on its heels. I suppose it must have been that evening that we were sitting at dinner behind an Arab mud wall—I seem to remember that we actually had a table and a lamp—and a mournful swishing sound approached us high in the blue dusk overhead and Major Footner had time to glance up, raise his eyebrows and observe "Shrapnel," before a dull thud could be heard in the direction of the town. We were digging new trenches all next day in broad daylight and shrapnel burst over us fairly often, though why, as we had practically no cover at all, there wasn't more of it I can't now imagine. All that I can remember of those first shells is that, as one stood about in the

open, they gave one an uncomfortably naked feeling; and that as I walked back the few yards to the doctor behind the mud wall with the first casualty, a boy in my own platoon, who was hit in the shoulder, I suddenly remembered supporting Wilfred through the falling rain after he had sprained his ankle that afternoon at Rugby five years ago. For some days first experiences went on accumulating. Our first night in the front line I remember more vividly than most of them. The garrison had gone to ground by now and we were to hold the extreme left of the line in rotation with a company of the Royal West Kents. Behind us the loop of the river made a U-shaped bag, with the town of mud houses in the bottom and the line of trenches across its mouth. We filed up the communication trench, bulky with overcoats and equipment. It was a cold December night. The trenches were still not deep enough, the Turks were about fifty yards away, and bullets were cracking and whining all round us. We took over the trenches and I saw my sentries posted, and I remember how, as I first stood on the fire-step and peered over into the tumultuous dark, it suddenly occurred to me that, though the enemy couldn't see me, at any instant one of these fortuitous bullets might be in my brain, and how, just because this had occurred to me with such startling vividness, I continued, like an idiot, to peer over for some seconds longer than was necessary. After this I strolled down our trenches again, and the stolid, honest Hampshire lads of my platoon would turn to glance at me with a friendly grin of half-sheepish excitement. Suddenly there was a louder crack than any, right in my ear

it seemed, and a sudden numbing impact in my right arm. I sat down abruptly on the fire-step and voices at once called excitedly down the trench for the M.O. I got off my British warm, expecting to see blood soaking through my tunic underneath. There wasn't a vestige. And by the time the M.O. had come blinking and bending anxiously round the corner, I had discovered, to my consternation, that all I had to show him was three small pin-points of blood, which looked as if some one had stabbed me with a darning needle. It was a humiliating and somewhat mysterious affair. Presumably a bullet must have hit the corrugated iron in the parapet of the trench beside me and sent some fragmentary splinters of it through the thick layers of my clothing. Despite the derisory insignificance of those scratches they decided to return me as wounded. My arm, it was explained, might conceivably prove to be poisoned. Supposing I lost it? If I hadn't been officially returned as wounded I shouldn't be able to claim a pension. And so my one outstanding distinction in the Great War was achieved. No one in the official casualty lists can have been wounded more slightly than I. A further curious feature of this absurd incident is that it has left me with a permanent scar.

The fact is that even experiences which seem to me now, in anxious but cushioned middle-age, as if they must have reached the limit of the horrible, were not in fact, provided that you didn't have too much time to think about them, particularly alarming at the time. On Christmas Eve, for example, the Turks made a desperate attack on the fort on the extreme right of our line; they bombed their way in to our

trenches, were driven out, but clung on to the debris of the shattered mud wall. That night we were ordered up to the fort from our place on the extreme left. For some hours we lay, with fixed bayonets, flat on the open ground, and bitterly cold, a few yards behind the front line trench and the breached wall, where a terrific fusillade was going on—waiting to receive the Turks if they should break through. It seems to me now that, were I miraculously transported to that situation this evening, I should find it almost unsupportably horrible. But try as I will, I can't remember feeling alarm or horror then. Whereas I do very vividly recall from that evening the annoyance, the weariness, the interminable and mysterious halts of our straggling journey to the fort in single file across the whole breadth of our front line trenches, and how the roar of the fighting in the fort swelled louder and louder and yet we seemed never to reach it, and how eventually we lay flat for an hour in a shallow scratch in the earth and hadn't a notion where we were. This I do remember as a strain on the nerves. And as the night wore on I developed an agonising cramp in the stomach, and, when we trailed back down the front line again at dawn, could hardly drag myself along—that too, I can remember vividly still. But, try as I will, I can't recall being alarmed at the fighting. The fact is, fighting is much less alarming than one would suppose—while it is going on. It is the anticipation that is the devil. Two of my few independent commands occur to me as reminders of that contrast. One evening, some while after we had dug ourselves completely underground, I was told to take out my

platoon and silence a Turkish machine-gun which had been enfilading our left flank from across the river. This meant leaving the trenches as soon as it was dusk and going down to the river bank under heavy but unaimed fire and digging ourselves in there in the couple of hours or so before the moon rose. If we didn't get underground before the moon got up, the front line Turks would see us and wipe us out. Moreover, I had to site the trench more or less at right angles to our own front line, so that we could fire at the enemy across the river on its flank, and yet not quite at right angles, or we should ourselves be enfiladed by the enemy from their front line this side of the river. The men dug feverishly, while I paced about and cheered them on, and a stream of bullets swished ceaselessly past overhead. It was pretty light before we were adequately dug in, but we had not a single casualty. I would go a considerable distance out of my way to avoid having to repeat that experience to-day, but all that I can recall of my sensations at the time is an anxious, but faintly pleasurable, excitement. What a difference, though, when you had time to think! Later in the siege, when the Tigris had flooded both sides out of their front lines and there was a good mile between the Turks and us, we used to hold a picket well in front, of our front line, with twenty men and a subaltern. This was a sacrifice post. If the enemy attacked, you were to hold on as long as you could, so that the main line would have time to get ready for him. It was hardly likely that you would survive. One day we were told that the Turks were massing troops, as if for an attack, in force. It was my turn for the out-

post. No pleasurable excitement now! That familiar sinking in the pit of the stomach had returned—for imagination was at work. So too when, downstream, Gorringe was making one of his earlier pushes to relieve us, and we stood to all day, ready at a moment's notice to make a frontal attack on the besiegers across a mile of flat desert and several lines of barbed wire, with no artillery support to speak of, and troops who by now were only just strong enough to carry their full equipment on the march. I was certainly frightened then, chatting with unnatural gaiety to my platoon and smoking all too many of my last remaining cigarettes.

All the same, for an over-imaginative person who, as a child, had been as nervous as a cat, what seems to me surprising now is that I shouldn't have been more distressed by the protracted misery and boredom of the five months' siege; and in particular, as time began to hang heavy and empty on our hands, that I shouldn't have been more homesick. The siege, I imagine, meant much more distress for my parents, who were eight months without a letter from me, than it ever did for me. It is astonishing, and on the whole merciful, how much one can take for granted and how soon. I tell myself this, a trifle half-heartedly, when imagination falters at the present horrors of China or Spain. Only occasionally in Kut did some unusual incident stir specially poignant memories of another life. There was Christmas Day, for example. The fighting in the fort had been followed by an unnatural calm. These were the early days of the siege and we were to have a Christmas breakfast—of sausages—in the front line.

But soon after dawn a dust-storm got up. In a few minutes every face was a grey mask. We crouched under blankets, but each mouthful, when the sausages came, was coated thick with dust on its way to our mouths. Afterwards I sat with my head in my blanket on the fire-step and read a battered *Adam Bede* I had picked up in the trenches. *Adam Bede*, I suppose—I haven't read it since—is a moral tale; there is the downfall of Hetty, is there not, and a certain amount of robust Victorian Radicalism. But what told on me then was the bits I normally skip, the elaborate descriptions of the English countryside. I laid the book down on the fire-step and peered out at the murderous desolation in front of me and thought of church bells on Christmas morning sounding across the quiet fields of England, and the reflection of the firelight flickering on the brass fender in the dining-room at home. And I wondered unhappily "What will they be doing now at home?" for all the world as I used to wonder during the old, anguished returns down the slow South Eastern—Blackwater, Farnbrough, Ash for Aldershot—on the last day of holidays from school. But save for such occasional lapses I remained curiously equable and cheerful. And after each announcement of a new failure of the relieving force downstream I reflected with unshaken confidence, "It will be all right in the end." The first failure came on January 21st. The river had flooded our front line that morning and eventually we had had to leave the trenches precipitately at the double, pursued by rifle fire from the Turks; an hour or so later the Turks in turn were flooded out and with-

drew rapidly in disorder under our fire. Aylmer's guns—it was Aylmer then—had been thudding downstream during the day, but as night drew on they began to die away. Turks and water together, apparently, had been too much for his exiguous forces. At about midnight after that day of confusion, Dick Lacy and I found ourselves sitting, I can't now remember why, on a traverse of the communication trench. On the parapet nearby a dead man sprawled in the moonlight. Aylmer's guns had almost ceased. I sardonically recited Clough's *Say not the struggle nought availeth*. It was very Rugbeian, I thought, as I searched my memory for the manly rhythms (Clough is one of the Rugby poets, with Walter Savage Landor, Matthew Arnold and Brooke), and how uncannily appropriate to the moment—*Say not, indeed, the enemy faints not nor faileth And as things have been they remain*. No doubt, too, *far off through creeks and inlets making, comes silent flooding in, the main*. For Aylmer was presumably having the same trouble with the floods as we were; indeed, though we didn't know it then, it was the floods, with the Indian Government's dilatory parsimony, which were to seal our fate. But on the whole, Clough seemed encouraging—*Your friends pursue even now the fliers And but for you possess the field*. Only, as Dick pointed out, the guns downstream didn't sound as if that were happening.

Hunger, I suppose, began about the middle of March. Soon we were living on a few ounces of of coarse brown bread and a little horse or mule each day. There was also a little crude lime juice to mix with the water of the Tigris. But that was all.

What sapped the strength in that diet wasn't so much that there was so little of it as that it didn't contain any sugar or starch. Gradually hunger, and especially the lack of anything sweet, grew to colour the imagination, waking and sleeping. These ravenous yearnings obtruded themselves on everything one thought or did. One would lay a sentimental novel down, as hero was gathering heroine into his arms, to speculate on what the lovesick pair were likely to eat for lunch—as to which, alas! the novel would be silent. One would compose imaginary menus, and gloatingly, course by course, talk over the heroic meals of the past. One thought by day and dreamed by night, not of the victory of the relieving force, but of mutton cutlets, of York ham, above all, of being let loose in a confectioner's. Leathery majors of the Indian Army would look up dreamily from a hand of bridge in the Mess, or break off their canvassing of bygone scandals at Ootacamund, to describe gloatingly what they would do when one day Aylmer, or Gorringe, brought us stores upstream. And these hard-bitten warriors were not thinking of corkscrews and bottles of whisky. They were planning to sit down with a tablespoon to a pot of jam. After a few weeks of this diet the troops weakened quickly. By the end of the siege few of them could have marched three miles without collapse, and burly privates of a British line regiment, strolling idly along the trenches, would crumple suddenly as their legs gave way beneath them.

## VI

### ANABASIS

I LIT one of my Arab cigarettes, thinking that a cigarette might help me to look jaunty. At the end of the shadowy alley ahead was a glimpse of the glaring street, lined with the people of Baghdad, waiting for us. We had been told to form up two deep, seniors at the front, a hundred officers of the captured garrison brought up stream from Shamran camp in a decrepit river-steamer. At the head of the column a couple of lieutenant-colonels were already about to wheel out into the hot sunlight of the staring streets. Clearly one should look jaunty, and I was far from feeling jaunty; I had been very sick in the small hours, clinging feebly to the railings on the lower deck of the *Khalifa* among a crowd of sleepy Indian servants and apathetic Arabs. So I stuck the unlighted cigarette between my lips, adjusted my *topi* to a rakish angle and listened to Marstock of the Sixty-seventh at my side, who professed to expect to make a lasting impression, as we passed, upon the amorous ladies of Baghdad. (He assured me that they *were* amorous—"You remember the Arabian Nights.") My heart quickened slightly as we neared the corner of the alley. Arabs on the river banks had run beside the *Khalifa* with a shrill *ululatus*, and drawn fingers meaningly across their throats. Baghdad, no doubt, had in store for

us an even more macabre greeting. There would be jeering, curses obviously; would they throw things, I wondered, or try to lynch us? We rounded the corner. On both sides the sunny street was densely thronged with a turbaned and many-coloured crowd. Down the centre threaded our slender file of khaki, flanked by ragged Turkish gendarmes with rifles on their backs and whips in their hands. The crowd was completely silent. It just stared. And every now and again some thrust from behind sent the front ranks surging involuntarily towards us, and our escorts would beat them back with their whips like dogs. Almost at once a gendarme ran up with a light for my cigarette. I smothered a passing impulse to explain by signs that in England we never lighted cigarettes. How, after all, could he tell that the principal property in my rôle of the nonchalant captive was going up in flames with the tinder-dry tobacco? Wreathed in smiles meanwhile, Marstock was blowing kiss after kiss to the elderly and unresponsive females who leaned from upper windows. We went on, chatting, past the Government buildings, and a Military School, from which a few undersized pupils hurried out and stood at attention, into the sudden cool of the high-roofed bazaar, where a German sailor, with *Goeben* on his cap, greeted us with a friendly grimace. I had long since forgotten to act nonchalance; it seemed so obvious by now that it was the spectators who were on exhibition, and not we. Past a great mosque inlaid with coloured tiles, and beneath a high balcony on which two boys, sitting alone, grimaced at us and made gestures of cutting throats, we came, after an hour

and a half of heat and glare, and the silent staring of the crowds, under a gallows-crowned arch into an open space before the empty cavalry barracks where we were to be lodged. Marstock said that he thought there must have been a good deal of poetic licence in the Arabian Nights.

We had taken the first step in our interminable journey from Kut to the remote highlands of Anatolia. Ever since the surrender, a fortnight earlier, when the long grey line of ragged and wolfish Turks had marched in with banners past the fort, the garrison had been breaking up into fortuitous particles. Some of the officers had reached Baghdad before us, others were still on their way. Dick Lacy was still in a hospital tent at Shamran. To the diseases which were raging before the end of the siege, had been added a new and mysterious variety of enteritis, said to be aggravated by the effects of the dirty Turkish biscuit on the starved. It began with cramp in the stomach and usually finished off its victims inside of twenty-four hours. I visited Dick in his hospital tent and elaborately affected not to hear the ceaseless groaning of half-conscious men around him. I had read the burial service over one of my own platoon that morning, a silent Hampshire lad who had been a gardener before the war. . . . A week after the fall of Kut the rank and file of the garrison had been marched off into the desert, to the grimmest martyrdom, as it was to prove, of the war. Nothing would persuade the Turks to allow a single officer to accompany them. After five months of siege these men were as weak as rats from starvation, none of them fit to march

five miles; they were full of dysentery, beri-beri, scurvy, malaria and enteritis; they had no doctors, no medical stores and no transport; the hot weather, just beginning, would have meant in those deserts much sickness and many deaths, even among troops who were fit, well cared for and well supplied. A Turkish medical officer had cursorily inspected those whom our own doctors had picked out, where all were unfit, as least capable of marching. Of these he had approved less than a third, mostly Indian Mohammedans. And even among those whom our own doctors had not selected there were some who had died, a couple of days later, in the rest camp at Shamran. But grim as were the prospects of the company which set out into the desert on May the 6th, they were as nothing to the reality of which appalling and fragmentary reports were to filter through to us for months to come. As soon as they were out of sight of Shamran camp, their Arab guards had begun to steal boots, helmets and water-bottles. If a sick man lagged under the burning sun he was either clubbed mercilessly on the head, or left to die slowly by the wayside. Parties of our own officers, travelling later along the same roads, would find British soldiers lying dead by the wayside in their own filth; or dying slowly on some dung heap on the fringe of an Arab town. They found a party of fifteen which had kept precariously alive for weeks by begging scraps from passing caravans, until at last only one had strength to crawl to the nearest water, a hundred yards away. They found men they had known in their own regiment whom they could no longer recognise, even when they heard their

names, shambling skeletons whose faces had become mere livid masks of dust. Several had jumped down a well, to end their sufferings so. One at least had been buried alive. By October report said that of the two thousand three hundred British, barely six hundred survived. Of the fate of some hundreds nothing has ever been known, from the moment they marched from Shamran camp.

Just before they left Shamran that 6th of May, some belated Christmas gifts, which the relieving army had been allowed to send upstream, were hurriedly handed out to them. There were plum-puddings and tinned foods, soap and cigarettes. And so they ate their last Christmas dinner, munching, as they stood, hurriedly, under the broiling summer sun, waiting for the order to fall in. They had now nothing but what they could carry, and they had tied some poor odds and ends on to themselves with string—fragments of fire-wood or empty tins; and some even had bottles of scent from these eleventh hour gifts dangling from their belts. The order came to march. We shook hands and waved farewell with a show of cheerfulness. Some of them were still gnawing slices of plum pudding.

By now I had come to accept these dreamlike events as a matter of course, with occasional regrets for the past, yet with no anxiety whatever for the future. I find this cheerful indifference difficult to account for in retrospect. When I was deadly sick or seized by agonising pains in the stomach, it just didn't occur to me that this might well be the beginning of one of half a dozen swiftly fatal

diseases which were now rife among us. It is possible, of course, that this is why I never contracted any of them. We were about too to begin a fifteen hundred mile journey over desert, mountain and waste, eating what coarse and dirty food we could buy from Arabs by the way, drinking from foul and stagnant pools, walking great distances by night and sleeping unsheltered under the sun by day. For this anabasis my equipment consisted of a battered *topi*, a light khaki drill jacket lacking two buttons and torn in four places, a grey shirt, open at the neck, a pair of invaluable thick khaki trousers bought at an auction at Kut, some many-holed socks and a pair of ammunition boots. In reserve I had two pairs of khaki drill shorts, some ragged puttees, a pair of shoes made by a Chinaman in Quetta and now sadly in need of repair, two pairs of undarned socks, a waterproof considerably the worse for several encounters with barbed wire, and, surprisingly enough, a pair of English pyjamas which still retained one button. In addition to this wardrobe I still possessed a small rubber sponge, a safety razor and several blunt blades, a face towel, some soap and a toothbrush, a tin plate, a spoon and fork, an enamel mug, a fountain pen, a tiny New Testament and the first volume of the Oxford Text Odyssey. Such of these possessions as I didn't carry on my person were rolled up in a tattered valise. We were better off than the doomed column which had marched from Shamran. The Turks would allow us donkeys to carry baggage; we should even be able to ride a donkey, if we wished to, one hour in every four. Moreover the Turk is a great respecter of

rank. If we thought we were being marched beyond our powers, unlike the men we should be able simply to refuse to move farther, and, instead of shooting us, the Turk would shrug his shoulders and acquiesce. None the less it was a formidable journey which lay ahead of us, and it was a mercy perhaps that I was young enough and weary enough to regard it with apathetic optimism, taking no thought whatever for the morrow, and still irrationally confident that somehow all would be well.

We were approaching the lower slopes of the Amanus. Evening was falling and the country was all bushes and stunted oak, in which, spectral in the twilight, sat family after family of glooming storks. I was deadly sleepy and had just discovered that it is possible to sleep, for a few steps at a time, as you walk. I had tried holding on to a baggage cart as I trudged, and I had tried sitting on one of the angular, unsaddled donkeys. There wasn't much to choose, I decided; whatever you did, every few seconds your brain was jolted back from surging depths of sleep. I found it painful to swallow, too, just now, and every step seemed to jar mysteriously through my inwards. I closed my eyes as I plodded, and, remembering the Homeric recipe, began to cheer myself by recalling more uncomfortable or more macabre episodes from the immediate past. There was the evening, about a week ago, when I had been seized with violent pains in the stomach and had been put into the sick-cart and agonisingly jolted for an hour to the next halt, where I was dosed with numerous opium pills, fell into a stupor

and woke completely recovered in the morning. There was the halt, where, among the rubble of fallen masonry in Kala Shergut, earliest capital of the Assyrian Empire, I had a bout of fever, and Sargon and Sennacherib had stalked grotesquely through my disordered dreams. Or the pond where I had drunk greedily on the first of our long marches, and the moon, suddenly sliding from behind the cloud-wrack, had showed up the deep chocolate of the stagnant water, and I had gone on greedily drinking. And the Dantesque silhouette of our straggling cavalcade against the flames of the grass-fires which burnt all across the desert from Mosul to Aleppo—Arabs prodding the open sores on their donkeys with pointed sticks, stray fez-topped Turkish foot-soldiers plodding dejectedly on foot or lankily jogging on donkeys' backs, the occasional baggage cart with a dozing Arab huddled aloft. I looked up with a start. We were meeting a small detachment of Turkish infantrymen. They shambling apathetically south in twos and threes on the other side of the track, with their eyes on the ground, at the ungainly lope which a Turk can keep up all day. Suddenly one of them looked up. He ran across, patted my shoulder, grinned encouragingly and handed me his half-smoked cigarette. "Inglees?" he said. "Inglees," I nodded. He patted my shoulder again and shuffled clumsily back after his comrades, who had plodded on without turning their heads. In a moment he was lost to sight in the dusk.

For two hours we rested at the foot of the pass and then heaved ourselves wearily to our feet for the climb. There was a bright moon now. On the right

of the road, the rock stood up smooth and sheer. Some one just ahead of me called suddenly, "Look!" and there was a dead man lying at the roadside, an Armenian in fez and coloured shirt and baggy grey trousers. Half a mile or so farther up I was trudging alone when I came suddenly on a woman with a small child in her arms, lying motionless in the shallow ditch beneath the rock. Both mother and child were dead, but they seemed to lie at ease, their faces so white and peaceful in the moonlight that they might have been asleep. There used to be two kinds of Armenian massacre. Occasionally orders would arrive from Stamboul, and the Armenians of the district, men, women and children, would be taken to a field outside the town and shot down. More often the young men would be shot or conscripted, the old men, the wives and the children would be told that to-morrow they were to start, with what they could carry, for an unknown destination. Day after day they would be herded on, and soon, every day, some would be left dead by the roadside. It is an ancient tradition of the East. There was a King of Assyria who drove the people of Elam into Egypt, to make room for them transplanting the people of Egypt, with magnificent simplicity, to Elam. The Hebrews sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon; but their journey to Babylon from Palestine must have given them even more cause for tears.

Cracks of cold, white dawn were splitting the sky over our right shoulders as we came into a mulberry grove, hours later, on the far side of the pass, and lay down for the morning's rest. I had moved some,

but not all, of the sharper stones from beneath my back and was resting uneasily till I felt energetic enough for another scrabble, wondering how I should fare without money—all my remaining cash had been stolen at Aslahie—when through the stems of the mulberry trees I saw in the open, stony track beyond the grove an endless line of Armenians. Women bowed beneath huge bundles, women trailing children after them by the hand, white-bearded patriarchs perched on mattresses on donkeys' backs; then a gap; and then more—more bowed women with bundles, more women leading children by the hand, more patriarchs and mattresses on donkeys. Not a sound, not a gesture of despair from the doomed column, as it streamed slowly and apathetically away beyond the mulberry grove in the cold grey dawn.

. . . . .

I imagine that all that was wrong with me, during the last few days of our two months' journey, was exhaustion. We had travelled from Baghdad eighty miles north by rail to Samara, which in 834 A.D., for six unprosperous reigns, had been, instead of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphs; thence ten days on foot across the desert, north, by way of unclean Tekrit, in which Salahud Din, whom we call Saladin, was born, to Mosul, which was Nineveh. Thence, nine days west, still on foot, across desert land now burning with grass-fires, for Ras-el-Ain, past Nizibin, long since, incredibly enough, a University town, in which the Nestorian heresy was taught, and a garrison too, from whose eastern gate, in the cool of evening, Roman soldiers would stroll

out and chat idly of the last Parthian raid. From Ras-el-Ain by rail, by way of Harran, to which some say Abraham journeyed from Ur of the Chaldees, and which centuries later became Carrhae, where the injudicious Crassus lost an army, the honour of Rome and his own head to the Parthians; and so across the Euphrates to Aleppo. On foot and in carts across the moonlit Amanus range, where Arab speech gives way to Turkish, and into the plain of Adana, a cup which, as Xenophon, who also looked down on it from the foothills, justly observed, "mountains surround on every side." Over the Taurus, a sea of sunlit pines, to another stretch of rail which took us by Konieh, where Madame Soulier of the Hotel Baghdad saved my life, as I now suspect, by cashing me a cheque, to Angora, where Augustus set up the Monumentum Ancyranum, and thence six days East by road for Kastamuni, our destination. During these last few days, though I was not ill, I had begun to experience the interesting symptoms of extreme physical exhaustion. Soon after we had reached Kastamuni, my companions were kind enough to persuade a Turkish doctor to pay me a special visit because (as they told me months later) they thought that I was one of the two who, of all our scarecrow cavalcade, seemed likely to die first. The old gentleman said encouragingly that all I needed was to eat plenty of butter and drink plenty of milk. It was something of a council of perfection, butter or milk at that time being not too easily procured. And in any case it was superfluous, since I was already grimly determined to drink every drop of milk I could get

hold of. Deep in my inmost being, I craved for milk as a drunkard craves for spirits. It was not my mind consciously arguing, milk will be good for me; I must drink it. My body knew better than my brain. It was a mere physical desire for the taste of milk which possessed me. Hitherto I had always rather disliked the taste of milk, but now I pursued milk as the addict pursues opium. And then, suddenly—as soon, I suppose, as I had turned the corner—once more I didn't care for milk in the least. However, neither during those weeks of my milk-passion, nor during these last days between Angora and Kastamuni, had I any notion that there was anything wrong with me. All I knew was that I was *cold*; cold deep inside me, beyond my bones. And that when I walked I needed to think carefully about each step, as if my feet were heavy weights which I had to swing at the end of ridiculously long legs, aiming them each time at a particular spot on the ground ahead of me. Not that I had to walk much by now. I had been put, with two others, in a covered cart set apart for the sick, and lay for the most part with my head on the feet of one of my companions. The other (he died soon after we got to Kastamuni) had a tattered copy of Hardy's *Trumpet Major* which he let me take turns with him to read. I ate nothing these last two days, but somehow got two cups of milk, from a stray peasant. Our last night but one we slept on the slope of Ulgaz Dag. Long afterwards Johnston of the Gunners assured me that he had seen me, in the cold dawn of next morning, bathing in the icy mountain stream. He said that this had astonished

him, because I looked so desperately ill. I certainly did not remember going near the stream myself, and I told him that I thought he must have mistaken me for some one else. How could one forget bathing under such extraordinary conditions? Not that I was likely to have been taking precautions to avoid chills, since I had no idea that I wasn't in more or less normal health. But it had been a walk of a hundred yards or so, as I remembered it, to that stream and I could hardly believe that I should have had the energy for that. Also I had been shivering ceaselessly for two days by then, and it seemed almost incredible that a passion for cleanliness should have taken me out of my blanket, much less into an ice-cold torrent. However, Johnston was quite positive and he is a singularly accurate person. I mention this otherwise unimportant affair because it may be thought to throw some light upon the curious incident which followed next day. As to whether in fact the one has any relation to the other I do not myself venture to express an opinion.

At midday on the third of July, two months and four days after the fall of Kut, we jolted uncomfortably over cobblestones into hill-circled Kastamuni. The whitewashed building, once a Greek school, to which, with twenty or thirty others, I had been assigned, was perched high up the hill slope on the far side of the town, and the last steep half-mile had to be walked. I was the last to reach it, for I had lagged behind, pausing every few steps to rest. There was a knot of red-fezzed onlookers on the stony mound by the house. Opposite the door was

a stone trough and a rough wooden bench; yes, and a Turkish soldier with a furry fez and a rifle slung across his shoulder was shambling towards the door ahead of me. The little garden of Dangerfield's villa, the alarming picture on that sheet of paper, the Dark Gentleman himself—suddenly they all took shape again in my mind. Four days' journey from an inland sea! That would certainly suit Kastamuni. I glanced up at the cluster on the mound. There could be no doubt. On the extreme left, in a red fez, stood the Dark Gentleman. Our eyes met, but he gave no sign of recognition. I hesitated for a moment and then went on into the house.

## VII

### OUTSIDE THE WORLD

FOR two and a half years, withdrawn from the world, poised between past and future, I should have plenty of time to digest my two-fold education. We relinquished none of our shibboleths. Should we get enough air and exercise? For weeks we were constantly preoccupied with this anxiety. Considering that, save for a few days in Baghdad, Mosul, Aleppo and Angora, we had not slept inside four walls for seven months, and that we had just completed a seventeen hundred mile journey in the last stages of fatigue, it was something of a tribute to the persistence of an Anglo-Saxon training. I remember, during the first days, playing catch in a tiny yard with another devotee of the Goddess of Exercise. At Rugby I had been quite a cricketer, but now I found it quite impossible to judge the flight of a ball. Time after time the simplest of catches would seem to be dropping straight into my hands, and time after time I failed so much as to touch it. This lapse of co-ordination between eye and muscles was yet another, I suppose, of the symptoms of exhaustion. . . . Kastamuni too assumed that we had retained our shibboleths. Its tradesmen tumbled over each other to cash the "cheques" we wrote them on British banks, at far above the official rates of exchange. The assumptions behind this eagerness

were remarkable. The scraps of paper, for which they paid us in cash down, must in any case be valueless until the end of the War, and would even then continue to be valueless if the British lost the War or the writers of the cheques proved to be dishonest.

But if the past was still potent, it was the future which haunted us. When, in the first place, should we get home? Should we indeed ever get home? Each in his own degree and manner we thrust the grim misgivings out of our consciousness. There is material for a pretty psychological monograph on prisoner-of-war neuroses. Once again it was hardest on the old. I imagine that Colonel Ambrose, for example, seldom ceased brooding on the future, of which, for him, there was so little left. He was very tall and thin with a drooping moustache and bright, dark, melancholy eyes, and he would pace up and down the mound by the hour, stooping a little at the shoulders and giving a little at the knees, and smoking Turkish cigarettes in a long wooden holder. He would greet the youngest subaltern or his oldest fellow-colonel with the same gentle, stooping courtesy and the same wistful smile. In his youth he had sown wild oats unsparingly, but in later life he had embraced religion and now spent many hours reading his Bible or discussing with evangelical sappers the exact relevance of the prophecies of Daniel to the end of the world war. By nature profoundly pessimistic, he had somehow convinced himself that the Christian faith required him to believe that all was always for the best in the best of possible worlds. And, as the months passed,

and the end of the War—and with it British Columbia, to which he was planning to transplant his family, to begin, symbolically I daresay, a new life—seemed to come no nearer, the Colonel's bright eyes grew even more melancholy and his smile even more wistful. He believed now that it is always wrong to take life, even the life of an animal. "I used to shoot elephants once, me boy," he said sadly, as I paced beside him on the mound. "I couldn't do it now—not take a great life like that." He had a disconcerting way of referring suddenly like this to his unregenerate past, even sometimes to the very hey-day of his oat-sowing. This surprised me a good deal at first; by nature he was so obviously the shy and reticent English gentleman of fiction. The least self-revelation must have made him prickly all over. I concluded that it was part of his present asceticism, a form of self-mortification, or penance. And perhaps he hoped that he might serve as a warning to the young, so that his past extravagances would be turned at last to good account. Personally I contrived to live cheerfully enough in the present, and my optimism remained unshaken. But I must have been suppressing my fears, I think. For years after the War was over, I used to dream repeatedly that I was a prisoner of war again, but married now and separated from my family, and that the war was never going to end.

It was interesting to observe the variety of ways in which the captives addressed themselves to captivity. Most of them belonged to the pre-War Indian Army, and practically all of them, it was obvious, were first-class regimental officers. Some

played bridge for the two and a half years. Some gossiped and read light literature. A few learnt Turkish. A number developed unsuspected talents and became carpenters, cobblers, cabinet-makers, or made themselves violins and bassoons and turned musicians. One or two studied the prophecies in Daniel. Two, of whom I saw a good deal, worked assiduously—at Turkish, Persian, Oriental History or French. “There is no knowledge,” said George Channer, “which does not somehow concern a soldier.” Fifteen years later these two were the two youngest colonels in the Indian Army. George Channer was my first introduction to the intellectual soldier. The intellectual soldier always fascinated me; Lord Thomson, the soldier and Air Minister who perished in the R101, once drove a hundred and forty miles with me in a draughty car on a cold winter’s night; and at the end of the journey his conversation was as enthralling as at the start. Nor is it the intellectual soldier only. Looking back, I realise that I have always admired and envied most the persons of high intelligence who have also been men of action; not only soldiers who were men of culture, but men of culture who were soldiers, and for that matter, poets who were explorers, statesmen who could write, captains of industry who were connoisseurs. Life in two worlds has always fascinated me. My suspicions of mere intellect are perhaps partly accounted for by my reverence for intellect in action.

As for me, I spent my time reading history and classical English fiction, writing inferior poetry and worse prose, talking to Dick Lacy about that border-

land between Berkshire and Hampshire from which we both hailed, and striking up a friendly acquaintance with a wider variety of human beings than I had encountered anywhere before. As to history, I had decided very early in the War that if I ever became a student again it would not be the ancients that I would study. The ancients were all very well; I was still loyal to the Oxford tradition that true education is necessarily what stockbrokers call useless. All the same I was inclined to think that I had got all the education out of the ancients that the ancients had to offer me. And it had been something of a shock, when we were ordered out to Quetta, to realise that, though I had written erudite essays at Balliol on the tactics of the Macedonian phalanx, I had not the slightest idea where Quetta was nor how the British Empire came to keep a Division there. It seemed possible too that there might be something to learn from history as to that remaking of the world which would soon presumably be beginning. And so, as books began to trickle through to us, I devoured Maitland, Froude and Stubbs and their kindred, with Borrow, Thackeray and Trollope sandwiched into the interstices of the menu. Even then, I think, I obscurely realised that among historians there are two great categories, the more numerous consisting of those from whose writing it is apparent that they have never themselves lived. I did not of course then suspect how this divorce between intellect and common experience, disastrously extended, would lay waste the nineteen twenties. As for my own crude literary exercises, the traditional destiny of *Juvenilia* is the flames and

this destiny they achieved with unexpected celerity. At Kedos, the third of our prison camps, we were watching one night the open-air production of a musical comedy, in which Colonel Ambrose, as stage manager, revived with melancholy pleasure the memories of his earliest and least respectable phase, when the wooden town burst suddenly into flames behind us. Dick and I raced for the bug-haunted khan which was our lodging, but the fire licked at the dry rafters even as we panted up. We made a dive for the door, but before we were through it, flames were already spouting from half a dozen windows, including our own. We reluctantly stood back, and I watched my dramatic fantasy, my travelogue and my diary meet their appropriate fate. We turned away disconsolately, to pick our way out of the fire-swept streets and to spend the rest of our captivity in the open air and in the clothes we then stood up in.

Prisoner-of-wardom may have bequeathed me a mild neurosis or two. When the General Strike came, with my wife abroad, I became irrationally apprehensive about our being cut off from each other indefinitely. I have a touch of claustrophobia too. Not long ago the lift in the Reform Club stuck with me between two floors, and instead of waiting rationally till the excited officials could get it moving again, I climbed down the iron staples in the shaft, and confronted my host in a generous coating of black grime. But I learned much more than I lost. I, who had once been a fastidious eclectic, learned to get on comfortably with pretty well every one I met. This is a gift, I am afraid,

which I have not permanently retained, though I can still recapture it on occasions—when I am among the working-classes, for example, or in America. I acquired a sense of values, too, and learned once and for all that kindness, courage and common sense are worth more than intellect; an indispensable lesson for one who had yet to live through the nineteen twenties. I learned to like and admire the common and simple, a habit conspicuously out of fashion with so many democrats to-day. I acquired my taste—to this day I hardly know whether it is credit or debit—for combining action with contemplation, and ensured, though I did not know it, that I should never, now, as I might have once, become a Scholar. I learned too to be able to read and write undistracted by noise. To this day, if I please, I can bury myself in a learned work, or write a fragment of an article or a book, during a chance half-hour at a railway terminus, and it surprised me afterwards to find that plenty of learned men at Oxford will not think of sitting down to their *magnum opus* unless they can set aside an uninterrupted week or month for work. I have known men who, to all appearances, were aching to write, wait for months, for years even, while almost every day of every week there were half-hours, hours, whole afternoons, which they might have used. At the worst, one can always get up an hour earlier in the morning. . . . Above all perhaps I learned to trust Providence, and to wait.

In the late summer of 1918 we had hardly realised that the tide had turned in France. The prospect was at its gloomiest and Colonel Ambrose was beginin g

to find the creed that all is for the best in the best of possible worlds almost too much for him. Suddenly a commission of Turkish doctors arrived to pick out some of us for exchange. Our only doctor was selected and went off. Dick Lacy was among those chosen to be sent home. "Of course I shan't go," he said to me in the most natural manner possible, "as you've got to stay." And nothing would alter his decision. Cheerfully and as a matter of course he assumed that this was the only decent thing to do. Nothing more remarkable than this happened to me while I was a prisoner of war.

Suddenly, as the cab drew out from Charing Cross on to the Embankment, I realised with an overwhelming shock of exhilaration what was happening to me. . . . This, this was the long dreamed of moment. In these last few seconds I had become free. Exalted, I stared at the river nocturne of blue and gold, drank in the luxurious whine of taxi wheels in the London mud. . . . True, there had been unforgettable moments before this. Going up that gangway on to the transport in the roadstead of Smyrna I had looked up and seen the British flag fluttering overhead against a blue sky, and thought, "Now I am a prisoner; and now," stepping off the gangway on to the deck, "I am free." There had been the first sight of England too, and the traditional white cliffs at that; but that thrill had been somewhat impaired by my physical sensations; all the way over on the tossing little transport I had had to keep saying to myself, "I *won't* come home seasick." In the taxi it was suddenly overwhelmingly obvious

that the real first moment of liberty had arrived. For more than three years I had moved always as a unit in a crowd. In Mesopotamia, on the anabasis from Baghdad to Kastamuni, in the subsequent Anatolian journeyings of our captivity, we had always been a herd—waiting tediously like a herd for orders, trailing like a herd on our involuntary marches, wedged like obedient cattle in carts and railway carriages. From Smyrna to Alexandria we had been packed tight on the floor of a stinking hold; right up to Charing Cross we had continued to travel *en masse*, blindly and to order. At Charing Cross—I was not to be met till Winchester—we had poured out of our crowded special carriages, not yet fully realising that this at last was release, and Dick Lacy had had his new Alexandria suitcase and its contents stolen before he had been two minutes on the platform. I had commiserated with Dick, said *au revoir*, found a porter, tipped him with symbolic extravagance, and piled into that blessed taxi. As it swung on to the Embankment I realised suddenly that I was alone. There was nobody to give me orders. I was free.

As far as Basingstroke the train from Waterloo was packed. A woman stood. An expansive gentleman in mufti, who had been delivering obviously expert opinions on the Near East from the corner seat, said meaningly to his companion that now women had the vote they must expect to be treated like men. They must not expect to have seats given up to them. I then gave the woman my seat. In the general conversation which followed—people talked to strangers in railway carriages in those days—it

somehow transpired that I had been a prisoner of war in Turkey. The expert on the Near East immediately insisted on giving me his seat. At Basingstoke all the others got out and two business men got in. The business men talked business and I leaned back and thought of my last glimpse of the lamplight in the open door as the Lanchester slid down the drive four years and three weeks ago; and how its acetylene lamps had bored down the east drive, past the glade, past Hampton's lodge, along the lane, past the home farm, into the main road to the right, down the hill past the last of our trees and on over the Roman road to Winchester. The train began to slow down and I found that I was shivering slightly. The business men were still talking business. I leaned out of the window and saw my father standing anxiously on the platform in his fur coat. I waved, and by the time the train stopped he was at my door. I tumbled out into the embrace of the fur coat. "I can't believe it's you," he said. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. The business men had stopped talking and were gaping out at us. One of them rose and handed my hand-luggage through the window.

There was no Lanchester now. We did the six miles in a dogcart, driven by a new groom, along the switchback Roman road over the chalk hills. At last we were passing the first of our trees. Up the hill, off the main road and to the left along the lane past the home farm, past Hampton's lodge, past the glade, up the east drive, to where my mother was standing in the lamplight in the open door.

## VIII

### BEFORE THE PLUNGE

SHOULD I stand for Parliament? My wife and I no doubt had pored over the problem intermittently for weeks and months before that, but it seemed to come to a head as, for some reason which now escapes me, we sat on a bench beneath an elm in the depressing University Parks at Oxford one warm afternoon in the early autumn of 1922. The problem, I see now, was as inevitable as the answer to it. If I had understood myself and my past a little better, I might have known what in fact, however much we debated, I should do. What I could by no manner of means have foreseen was the outcome of what I should do. But then how could I yet realise what it would mean that the wrecking 'twenties had arrived?

Inevitably I had accepted a Fellowship when that honour had been offered me, for deep down in me was a scholar who loved books and teaching. Inevitably too, however, I was drawn to the baleful glare of politics, for deep down in me was a lover of adventure, who desired action among common things and unreflecting people. I had stood in the High staring for the hundredth time at the almost intolerable beauty of the curve from Queen's to Brasenose and thrilled to the last enchantment of the Middle Ages; but I had read a good deal more history too, and I had begun to realise more clearly

than ever how many historians write as though they have never lived. Might not politics, the seductive fancy hovered, help me to understand history? I had already written a historical work myself and, though, curiously enough, it has maintained a small but steady sale for fifteen years, I was already aware that it had been written merely out of books. I knew the Bodleian Library by now, and that instantaneous effect, as its faint sweet mustiness greets you at the stair-top, of entering some refuge from life—a refuge where many a bookish historian, cloistered from harsh human realities, has spun his scholarly judgments on that distant world in which human realities are at their harshest, the world of politics. Traditionally, of course, the Fellow of an Oxford College should strive only for academic laurels, but my own College so uniquely outdid all others in its laurel harvest—almost a third of my colleagues at that time were Fellows of the British Academy—that it seemed excusable if an obscure junior Fellow attempted to diversify the tradition. Moreover there was my lifelong admiration for intellect in action, for life in two worlds. We all tend, as Oscar Wilde observed, to become the thing we love.

I had come back from the War devoid of political prejudices. The world in any case was beginning again. It did not seem to me then that the Conservative Party could play much part in it: it would surely not be one's business to conserve. I had not realised that in an age of change, whatever political labels may be worn, there are in fact no Conservative Parties. The Liberal Party, on the other hand,

appeared to be both moribund and increasingly corroded by the nonconformist conscience (though Mr. Laski, it is true, had assured me only the other day that if Lord Robert Cecil joined the Independent Liberals they would be in power within ten years). In the new Labour Party, it seemed, one might hope to work with, as well as for, the common man. I had been much affected by the brilliant, moving, and, as I had not then realised, somewhat unscientific works of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond on the wrongs of the working classes in the dawn of the industrial revolution. And Sir Leo Money's *Triumph of Nationalisation* had convinced me that the principle of national control, championship of which seemed to be then almost a monopoly of the Labour Party, had saved us from losing the War. Why should it not win us the peace? And if the central creed of the Party was the key to the future, and its professed object was to succour the sort of men I had seen marched off into the desert to their fate after the fall of Kut, what matter if the language of some of its partisans was extravagant and some of the appendages of its central creed exotic? The War had predisposed me in its favour. The nation organised for war had been a nation organised for service, in which the humblest private from the trenches was a hero and the name of the wealthiest profiteer was mud. The nation organised for war had been above all a nation united. I saw no reason why after the War these inspiring characteristics should not be reproduced in a nation organised for peace; I was still very young. My political faith indeed shaped itself as something very like a revival of Charles

Kingsley's "the Church, the gentleman and the workman against the middle classes and the Manchester men." Only for "middle classes" I substituted "profiteers."

I had made tentative contacts with this strange new Party for more than a year before our discussion in the Parks. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald had lunched in my College rooms a full eighteen months earlier in the February of 1921. This was the first time I met him. He had just come out of three years' retirement then, to fight the East Woolwich bye-election—in which he was destined to be defeated by the triumphant intervention of Horatio Bottomley. When Bottomley's candidate beat him many people thought that MacDonald was finished. Bottomley on the other hand had clearly reached his zenith. It is a pleasant reminder of the eternal vagaries of politics that not much more than three years later MacDonald should have been Prime Minister and Bottomley in gaol. Mr. MacDonald was tired that afternoon; I am not sure that I have ever known him not tired. He was to bring overwork to so fine an art that he almost seemed to thrive on it. A hall-porter in Downing Street once told me that he had been at Number Ten since Roseberry's premiership and that no prime minister had worked anything like such hours as MacDonald. The first thing I noticed about my guest that afternoon had been the sensitiveness of his face, particularly of the finely chiselled nose. He looked almost too sensitive for a politician. What was strange, almost unique, about him was that sensitiveness staring out of the countenance of a man who

was also obviously at first sight a dour, pugnacious fighter. That, and what I can only call his mysterious hinterland. There was a MacDonald whom no one, not even his closest friends, would ever know, a MacDonald whose eyes were fixed on other worlds than this. He said guardedly that afternoon that there might be a future for the intellectual worker in the Party, but that he would have to fight for it. At present the Party was under the narrowest trade union domination; many of the leaders did not want even him back in Parliament.

My first glimpse of the Party in the flesh, in the shape of a number of its members sitting round a table, had followed soon after that lunch. It was at one of those fussy Advisory Committees which all Parties proliferate from time to time. Waiting for the London train I had met Lady Mary Murray on the platform and she had been obviously surprised to hear where I was going. "I didn't know you were of that way of thinking." Unfashionable opinions were no passport to Lady Murray's bad books; she had spent her life championing the oppressed in too many quarters of the globe; and only the other day I had seen her rattling a collecting box in the dust and heat on behalf of the starving children of Central Europe, in a chattering stream of Eight Week pleasure-makers. But Lady Mary had known me for some while, and her evident surprise at the object of my journey reminded me with a slight shock that perhaps I should appear a rather exotic oarsman in this new galley. I was specially careful about my tailor in those days; maybe this Advisory Committee would prove to be a roomful of lean and

threadbare fanatics. I reached the House of Commons Committee Room rather late. The meeting was in full swing. I tiptoed in with downcast eyes and not till I had slipped modestly into an empty place at the crescent table did I venture to glance round at my colleagues. For one wild moment I was convinced that I had got into the wrong room, and that this must be a meeting of the Federation of British Industries. The confident faces, the opulent city suits were impressive, were indeed overpowering. The Committee, I fancy, was discussing the Machinery of Government. The conversation was immensely technical and authoritative—I understood very little and said nothing.

Our deliberations under the elm-tree were in a sense premature. We decided, of course, to take the plunge. Not long afterwards, the election of 1922 broke unexpectedly on the world. At the eleventh hour and on the telephone I was adopted as candidate. My bag was already packed when, a day or two later, the telephone rang again. A well-known local figure, explained the voice apologetically, had unexpectedly returned from abroad. The son of a wealthy local landowner and former Liberal Member for the City, he was popularly supposed to have become a Bolshevik in Germany. He would rouse immense interest and controversy; he was the one man who could win a seat. They knew, of course, that they were pledged to me, but perhaps under the circumstances I would understand. . . .? Almost without a pang I assumed the martyr's crown. The plunge was postponed. Providence had intervened. I have always been

ready to acknowledge these interventions. It seems unreasonable, I know, that Providence should concern itself with such banalities, and extremely difficult to see how, if it does, it can manipulate the jig-saw of human destiny. Nevertheless even two parallel lines meet in eternity.

The plunge was postponed for two years. In the meantime I fought an election, unsuccessful, of course, for the Oxford City Council. All politics in Oxford are Through-the-Looking-Glass politics. If at some crisis in the national fortunes you should wish to hear opinions wholly contrary to the main current, to all the main currents, of national feeling, dine in an Oxford Common Room. You will hear plenty of good sense, of course—one or two of the wisest men in the world live in Oxford—but infallibly you will make your bag of freak deliveries too. You may have listened up and down the country to working men, city men, politicians, cabinet ministers, commercial travellers; in Oxford, you can rely on hearing something you have never heard before and will never hear again. Oxford has always been the home of lost causes, that is one of its immortal charms. Fertile of White Rose Leaguers when the country is Radical, of Communists when to the rest of England Communism is scarcely even a joke, Oxford is ever its own unique and seductive self. The young have their own reasons for living on the wrong side of the political looking-glass; they desire, for example, to shock their relations. With the old it is different. An ingenious mind can view even the simplest situation

from a score of different angles; but in even the most complex situation it is only one or two which matter. The scholar is used to viewing his problems from every remotely relevant angle: the brilliant talkers too, probably indeed the people who get most amusement out of life, are those who can see most quickly the largest number of more or less relevant associations. Indeed it is because such people see a great deal that they make such delightful companions. But for practical affairs they see too much. They see more than they can sort their way through. A quick and far-ranging intelligence is usually fatal to prudent action. What we call good judgment depends on a grasp of the one or two essentials in a situation. The slow-witted often judge better than the hyper-intelligent simply because they see fewer of the inessentials. But just why it is that some people contrive to hit on the essential nine times out of ten is one of the most fascinating problems in life. I have watched one or two such minds at work, and wondered curiously how they contrived the constantly repeated miracle. One thing at least has been evident; their unerring judgment is not conscious reasoning; it is a kind of instinct. In Oxford<sup>1</sup> perhaps there is too much reason and not enough instinct.

Even municipal politics in Oxford lay beyond the Looking-Glass in those days. Only in the working-class quarters of the city were the Labour colours booed. There were no meetings in the election campaign. I issued an eloquent address and was

<sup>1</sup> Since the greater includes the less, everything said of Oxford applies, needless to say, to Cambridge.

introduced to a small gathering of supporters as "a member of a historic Oxford family," on the grounds, apparently, that one of my grandfathers had been the last Rector of Carfax. After this we just canvassed. Canvassing is almost always a waste of time. The electors I approached personally either said that they "could not yet see their way clear," or told me their life histories at amazing length, or proved to be presidents of the Conservative Association. My wife got some people to promise to vote for me, but then she is irresistible. Our cook went canvassing too, and was heard to say, "I ought to know, oughtn't I? I've lived with him for three years." My opponent was a publican and confined his activities to driving round the district on polling day in an open car and a fur coat. Needless to say, he was elected.

During that two years' interval there were plenty of other glimpses of the new Party from within. I went to the city in which I had nearly been a candidate and addressed my first big political meeting. A big political meeting—and by big I mean an audience of anything from a thousand upwards—is infinitely easier to address than a small one, and by small I mean an audience of anything from a hundred downwards. I have tried all sizes in my day. I have spoken to audiences of half a dozen and even less. A Member of Parliament on whose platform I was speaking the other day told his audience that he had sometimes addressed meetings which consisted of three men and a dog. When I followed him I told them that that was nothing; for myself, I had frequently spoken to

three dogs and a man. These waistcoat pocket meetings are easy. It is the meetings of twenty or thirty, particularly meetings of twenty or thirty in a room which would hold several hundred, which are the devil. Unless you are supremely skilful they remain a collection of twenty or thirty individuals. A good audience develops, while it listens, a collective personality of its own. It laughs, applauds, rustles as one man. This incidentally is what Rousseau meant by the *volonté générale*, and explains, though I must not go into that now, certain mysterious aspects of the French Revolution. A bad audience never achieves the *volonté générale*; there is only a *volonté de tous*, an aggregation of disparate, unwelded personalities. It is the unconscious aim of every public speaker to produce a *volonté générale*, a temporary collective personality, in his audience. And if it is a large meeting, predominantly favourable to the speaker's opinions from the outset, the collective personality is there waiting for him from the start. Labour meetings are the easiest of all to address. Opponents do not attend and disturb them. Not once, in the nine years in which I addressed Labour meetings in the strongholds of the opponents of Labour, did I hear anything that could be called interruption. Or only once, and that was at a country meeting where one of our speakers, a trade union organiser from a neighbouring town, saw fit to speak from the steps of the village war-memorial. Labour, I am afraid, is not so forbearing. The town meetings of my Conservative opponent became mere bear-gardens at election time. It was, and is, the same all over the country. There are places to-day where no

previously advertised non-Labour political meeting has been possible for years. This is an aspect of the democratic Party of which I had as yet no inkling. My friends used to surprise me by the frequency with which they asked how I managed hecklers; I hadn't realised that they were thinking of the experience of other Parties. During the years since 1931, on National platforms, though I have rarely failed, even in Seaham, sooner or later to get a courteous hearing, eight or nine times out of ten there have been rowdies to pacify or silence, eight or nine times out of ten some speaker in the course of the evening has been shouted down, and now and again any speaking by anybody has been impossible. This first big Labour mass meeting, however, nervous though I was beforehand, was easy going. The meeting was a ready-made success. It was May Day, and George Lansbury was there. I can never have seen a photograph of George Lansbury before then, but somehow, from references to him in the Press, I suppose—the mysterious episode of the *Daily Herald* and the Russian crown jewels had recently filled the headlines—I had somehow built up a vivid mental picture of a meagre and furtive revolutionary. And here was an elderly gentleman with white mutton chop whiskers and humorous eyes under drooping eyelids, with his hands in the side pockets of a blue double-breasted jacket, beaming disinterested goodwill on all and sundry. It was impossible not to accept him at sight as a favourite uncle. After the meeting he wrung me by the hand with emotion. "I always said," he exclaimed, "that the upper middle classes would

come over." Afterwards he told stories of his turbulent past. How at the old suffragette demonstrations his political record had made him always faintly suspect and once, after he had gradually allayed the suspicions of the chairman, a provincial mayor, he had instinctively swept up and pocketed, as was his habit at the end of a speech, the gold watch he always laid on the speaker's table in front of him. Only this time it was the mayor's watch, which he had borrowed before he rose. He talked in rich Cockney, in a voice husky from countless public meetings. Later that year, when he stayed with us at Oxford, he spoke of the learned works on history he had studied as a young man, whenever he could get hold of them, inquiring with humorous deference whether he was pronouncing their titles right. As a youth he had read all through Gibbon, carrying the *Decline and Fall* about with him, a volume at a time. Once, he said, as he was waiting in the lobby of a school for a young relative, a superior young schoolmaster had come up to him and said, "You are one of these Socialists, aren't you? Well, you ought to read Gibbon; that would cure you." "I am," replied Lansbury, picking up the volume from the bench beside him. Lansbury was one of the men whom the Labour Movement took unreservedly to its heart. And not only the rank and file; even the cliques liked Lansbury; of him at least no one was either jealous or suspicious. He was one of the wild men of the party, yet he overflowed with humour and goodwill towards everybody, including his opponents; he cared for the common people more than for theories; he was

neither sour nor embittered; in the best sense he was vulgar; he was enchantingly unlike the intellectuals. Unlike them, for all his iconoclasm, Lansbury was built upon tradition. His combination of revolutionary ardour with religious zeal, for one thing, was in a tradition which descends from Wycliffe and John Ball, through Cromwell and the Ironsides to Wesley, the anti Slave-trade campaign, and the nineteenth century; all the men who have had a wide influence in the Labour Movement have been of religious temper. Moreover, he loved, and even revered, the past. He often spent an hour, he said, in an old church, repeopling it in imagination. As he walked into Oxford Station, unmistakable in bowler hat and battered mackintosh buttoned up to the neck, the cabbies would shout pleasantries, to which he would reply with a wave and a jocular "Evening, gov'nor;" and on the platform porters and ticket-collectors would cluster round him, beaming. The dour idealogues maintained themselves precariously upon the surface of the Labour Movement, Lansbury proceeded from its very entrails. Years before I knew who or what Lansbury might be, I had heard Alfred Ollivant say that he was the most Christ-like person he had ever met. At the time the remark seemed to me foolish and slightly blasphemous. But I could see now what Ollivant had meant. Christ must have had that racy humour, that cheerful friendliness, that gift of rousing affection everywhere, that courage, that quick anger against injustice.

In the interval between the Election of 1922, when Providence had plucked me back from the brink, and

the Election of 1924, when I plunged clumsily full into the mill-stream, the party had made great strides. I had met Mr. MacDonald on his way back, in a still beribboned car, from Aberavon, on the morrow of that Election of 1922 which was the turning point of his career. That victory had brought him a new lease of life, physical as well as political. A little later, I had met him as Leader of the Opposition in his room at the House, complaining that Bonar Law didn't know how to treat the Labour wild men. Only the night before they had howled at the Prime Minister for half an hour for an answer on unemployment, which he had refused—and then he had given it. He should have given it at once, said Mr. MacDonald, or not at all. This sort of thing merely meant that when the Leader of the Opposition reproved his followers, they retorted impenitently that after all they had got what they wanted. The quality of the House, he thought, had declined since he was last in it; there were more mere business men. Labour members had always understood the squires; it was with the men of dividends that they had nothing in common. Incredibly soon, as it seemed, after that Mr. Baldwin had made his premature bid for a tariff, MacDonald was Prime Minister and the winter sun slanted through the escutcheoned window of the Long Gallery as, in a green knickerbocker suit, he explained the beauties of Chequers. The unwelcome turmoil of that unique reversal of fortune still engulfed his family. The post would bring Ishbel strange gifts, including a silver teapot commemoratively inscribed from anonymous donors. The Press was constantly ring-

ing up at unlikely hours to inquire what was the Prime Minister's handicap at golf and what he ate for breakfast. Malcolm hid in an upper room and read economics. In the midst of it all, the Prime Minister sat in his study, with neuritis and a touch of influenza, and prepared the answers to an interminable list of Members' Questions for the morrow. This was Sunday, a day of comparative rest. Normally he would be coming back from the House at 11.30 p.m., sitting up with Foreign Office despatches till two or three, and getting up again before seven.

There was turmoil of another kind at Chequers that summer. It was a blazing afternoon and the grass beside the long drive over the chalk hill was carpeted with yellow rock-rose. A surprising number of men in dark suits clustered on the rose-terrace on our left as we drove up. A detective ran up to stop us, but, recognising Malcolm, drew back. At the door another detective explained that he had forty-three journalists and photographers to keep quiet; he was about to line them up on the terrace in readiness for MacDonald and Herriot. They were at coffee but would soon be coming out. A minute or two later we were peering down from a first floor window on the assembled Fourth Estate. It clustered in the sunlight, adjusting focuses and chattering. An enormous yellow-faced Frenchman with a blue-black beard and whiskers sat apart in the summer-house and brooded morosely. Summoned to the hall, we found Malcolm's three sisters, Herriot's secretary, a man from the Quai d'Orsay, M. Cammerlinck, the interpreter, and Sir Ronald Waterhouse. Herriot,

curiously solid and preoccupied, came in from the study. Soon the chieftains and their entourage stepped out into the glare of the terrace and a confused babel of sound. A buzz of questions began, the cameras clicked and whirled, Herriot put his arm round MacDonald's shoulder, MacDonald shook hands with Herriot, they both shook hands with the journalists. Sir Eyre Crowe and M. Herriot's secretary, who was repeatedly getting lost, bustled mysteriously in and out. Every one seemed pleased and excited. After a while the Prime Ministers began to move off; they were going to walk to the ridge of Cymbeline's Mound, the "Prime Minister's Quarter Deck." The cinema men moved further down the path ahead of them for another shot. The rest followed slowly behind. Mr. MacDonald was saying, "No, but Robert Louis Stevenson . . ."

Meanwhile, of course, plenty of people were warning me against politicians. The belief that politicians are baser than ordinary folk is widespread. I even heard the dogma affirmed by its most distinguished modern exponent. Belloc, Chesterton and John Buchan dined in my College rooms one evening in the June of 1922. The conversation was surprisingly erudite. In a curiously small voice for so bulky a person, Chesterton would clinch an argument with a quotation in the original from the early Fathers, and in a curiously powerful voice for so slight a person, John Buchan would cap it with another. Belloc observed that the technique of political falsehood had changed. Gladstone used to be subtle and indirect. He avoided direct mendacity; he would say, "I would rather die than be accused of

such a thing." Even before the war the politer tradition had lingered. In the Marconi business one of the Ministers involved had said, "These lying rumours pass from one foul lip to another;" one foul lip, as Belloc observed, being his own and another Cecil Chesterton's. But nowadays when politicians wanted to tell lies, said Belloc, they just told them.

The exact point at which we were to take our plunge remained to be decided by Providence. In the Labour Party, as in the Conservative Party, the nature of the seat to be contested normally depends upon the purse of the aspirant. No purse, no prospects. The purse may be that of a Union, but purse there has to be. I remember in those early days discussing annual contributions to one's constituency Party with a young Labour Candidate in the lobby of the House. When I ingenuously told him the modest income out of which I should then have to contrive all these expenditures, he could not repress a sharp bark of derisive laughter. He is now a distinguished ornament of Communism. For a number of sufficient reasons I did not propose to buy a seat. Not much negotiation accordingly was required. It soon transpired that the plunge was likely to be taken in Gloucestershire. This was excellent. My people had been West Country for centuries. All through the eighteenth century they lived about Bristol. My grandfather was the first breakaway. And he was born at Clifton, a village then well outside Bristol. From Clifton he went up to Balliol in the spring of the Oxford Movement. From Clifton he had watched the mob down below in

Bristol burning the Bishop's palace in the Reform riots of 1831. At Clifton as a boy he started the daily diary which he kept every day till he died at eighty-five, the diary in which I was often to read of his leisurely rides on roads down which I was to whirl in cars from meeting to meeting. Later he was ordained and lived elsewhere. My father too, spent his active life out of the West, but he had gone back there by now and was living just outside what seemed likely to be my constituency. It was mixed, this constituency, in area mainly rural, in population about half industrial.

My Oxford colleagues were astonishingly kind about the whole affair, which must have been a nasty surprise to most of them. The Senior common-room of my College at that time was both extremely distinguished and rather elderly. Most of its members were Conservatives who remembered Lord Salisbury, and indeed Lord Beaconsfield, with warm regard. The Labour Party was still almost unknown in Oxford; its name suggested the class war, munition strikes in war-time, and the Russian Terror—a raw and hostile antithesis to the rich scholarship, the glowing mahogany, the shaded candles and the fine eighteenth century silver of the common-room. My unprecedented candidature must indeed have been a shock to my colleagues. But they never allowed me to hear a word of criticism or displeasure. They remembered, I think, in extenuation that I was an ex-service man, or, as perhaps they put it to themselves, a war case. Moreover, my seniors belonged to an earlier Oxford, an Oxford which had all but passed away, an Oxford in which, though in

some ways it may have been intolerant, the word ideology was as yet unknown. The tradition of Church and State has its limitations, but it is more genial and more tolerant, perhaps because it has roots in an older England, than the zeal of the Conventicle and the Nonconformist conscience. No doubt too, my colleagues were anxious not to embarrass me, for they had the fine manners of their type. Edward Armstrong, the pro-Provost, historian of eighteenth century Spain, genial and courtly, was a standing reminder that a scholar is always a better scholar for being a polished man of the world as well.

There was a drive or two between Oxford and Bristol down roads over-arched with the red and gold of autumn, down roads whose every bend and gradient I should learn by heart in the next seven years. There was an interminable wait in a small confectioner's shop, while a few doors away a distracted executive committee debated whether it should fight this Election, whether indeed it could afford to fight any Election, and what importance, if any, should be attached to the despairing protests of the Liberals, to the effect that the inevitable result of our entering the fray would be to unseat their sitting member and let in a Conservative. I addressed the committee encouragingly and withdrew, and again we waited in the confectioner's shop. At last an envoy arrived, triumphant. They had made up their minds. We were to fight. Back in the bare upper room among the committee we conferred excitedly with the men and women who were to be our friends and associates for seven years. A tall, grey-haired market-gardener from Winterbourne

explained, with much emotion, how my speech had put him in mind of the speech the Liberal member had made at *his* first adoption meeting eighteen years ago. A miner from Frampton Cotterell was wringing my hand. Mr. Randall, the Secretary of the Boot and Shoe Union, who was to be honorary agent for the Election, was patiently thinking aloud his impromptu plans for the next few days. My wife was in a corner surrounded by women. A reporter was licking the point of his pencil in anticipation of a statement by the candidate. Jack Wilkins was shouting, "That's all right, boy; we'll be with you." A confused uproar filled the room. Everybody seemed to be talking at once. The Election of 1924 had begun.

## IX

### IN THE STREAM

THREE days later in the November dusk we drove into Staple Hill in a diminutive Occasional Four, our suitcases in the boot. (I had repressed an irrational yearning to buy a carpet bag.) In Victoria Street Jack Wilkins and old Mr. Giles were already on the pavement. "It's all right, boy," shouted Jack. "The fight's begun. We'll be with you." I was to go straight off our seventy-mile drive to a series of meetings, mostly outdoor meetings in the cold and dark. It seemed an odd plan, but then for the next two and a half weeks all plans, when there were any, were odd. But more often there were none. Soon Jack Wilkins and at least four others were squeezing into the tiny car. "You're all right, boy; you're all right," muttered Jack encouragingly. "Now we're off." We were. We headed out into the night. I was still at the wheel. I had been driving for two and a half hours already and was now to drive, losing the way in tortuous lanes, backing and parking and turning, for another four hours in the dark, only breaking off to make four or five impromptu maiden speeches, and shake hands and chat with an unknown number of strangers. And meanwhile it would be my duty to produce on my fellow adventurers in the car, and on every one else I met, a continuous impression of calm and confident good

temper. It seems strange that the campaign was actually more than half-over before I decided that it was unwise to double the rôle of chauffeur and candidate. Naturally, we were late that night; one always is late on an election campaign. We lost our way two nights out of three, we lost our way that first night. This, however, did not discourage our car-full. The plump confectioner from Kingswood heaved continually with merriment as he recalled political misadventures of the lurid past. "Remember all them chaps buzzing stones at us, Jack? Lord I did laugh." His chuckles shook the car. Perhaps because of his social status—he had a shop of his own, at which small commercial travellers would eat cold ham and tomato chutney and exchange badinage with the proprietor—he always came to meetings in a bowler hat, a stiff collar, kid gloves and a smart light-brown overcoat. He was in a perpetual state of amusement. When I arrived, long overdue, at some remote meeting which he had been holding in play, he would whisper ecstatically, "My word, they've been letting me have it," indicating the obviously restive audience with an explosion of delighted chuckles. Jack Wilkins, too, never lost confidence, now or at any other time, that our goal was round the next corner. "Turn left here, lad," he would shout. "This'll be them. Now we've got 'em." And if that turning too gradually proved to have misled us, he would remain undaunted. "It's all right, lad. We'll be there. Jack knows." He was a slight elderly man with chronic neuritis, in a thin raincoat. The weather was often Arctic, but Jack's enthusiasm usually sufficed to keep him warm. None

the less, I was twice to sit by his death-bed in the next few years. But he rallied each time—he was so enthusiastic.

I had little time, as we nosed tentatively down the dark lanes, to wonder what I should say, if and when we found any one to say anything to. During the past week or two I had been apprehensively studying Election literature. It seemed curiously lifeless. However, by now I knew statistics about imports and exports and trade with Russia, and the current arguments about Nationalisation. And I was primed with answers to imaginary questions on agricultural wages and coal production. But none of this seemed likely to raise the spirits of a cluster of miners who would have been waiting in the chilly dark for the best part of an hour. I began to be glad that I was at the wheel. There was less time to be nervous. When at last we reached our goal it was obvious that, for this meeting at any rate, the Election literature had been a waste of time. That was not at all the sort of speech which would be required. A huddle of dark figures was dimly visible at the edge of the road. The leading miner of the village stepped forward. He was a sterling fellow whom I knew well afterwards. Himself uncouth and illiterate in speech he had a wife with the natural good manners of a great lady. Two of her sons, as well as her husband, were in the mines. They were on different shifts and the cloth, she said, was always on the table. But it was a spotless cloth, like the rest of the house. And though she was usually feeding somebody, she was always smiling and the house exhaled a cheerful comfort. It was curiously unlike a miner's cottage

in a modern novel. But then so were all the miners' cottages I ever knew. They were a most united and affectionate family, with a healthy respect for Dad. Dad, a loyal Methodist like so many of my friends in those parts—Wesley and Whitefield did their first field preaching in our chief stronghold, Kingswood—had Puritanism bred in his bones. He would never attend Labour functions at which there was to be dancing, and nothing would persuade him to have any dealings with a subsequent chairman of the local Party, who smelt, he said, of beer. However, at the moment I could see little of Dad, and Dad could see even less of me, and his introduction of the new candidate to the small and invisible audience was confined to saying that here was the young man they had been waiting for; he had turned up late and even now they couldn't see much of him nor could he, Dad, tell them anything; so they had better listen to what the young man had to say. Such was my first introduction to the electorate. I stood up on the driver's seat in the Occasional Four and began.

I talked to them about the irresistible advance of Labour; the pride of common people in a government which was really their own; the determination of their leaders, despite all their inevitable mistakes, to make England a safer place for work-a-day men and women to rear their children in. It is easy to speak in the dark. Occasionally there was a low murmur of assent. Now and again I touched on a controversial issue of the moment, but for the most part I kept to these simple but potent generalities. These after all, as I was to learn more surely every

day during the next seven years, are the rock on which the Labour movement was founded. Not one in a hundred of the men and women who came to our meetings cared anything for economic theories; very few of them even bothered much about the controversial issues of the moment. Class hatred was unknown to them, though most of them had a hereditary suspicion of "the Tories," whom they pictured as wealthy and unfeeling snobs. What they wanted was economic security. If they voted Labour, they voted Labour because they believed that the new Party was their own Party, far more likely than any other to give them the economic security they desired. If they called themselves Socialists, nine times out of ten that is what they meant by Socialism. If they applauded Socialist theories, nine times out of ten they applauded because they believed the speaker to be working for the simple practical ends which they desired, and were prepared to take his theories on trust, since theories were part of the mysterious political armoury apparently needed to win these desired ends. But often they came to a meeting, particularly to a meeting during an Election campaign, almost solely to assess, by their own shrewd instinctive processes, the quality and sincerity of the speaker. In the countryside at anyrate, a Party depends prodigiously upon its spokesmen. A year or two later a whole Branch of our organisation, slowly built up through months of patience, was disrupted overnight because a visiting speaker had harangued it with rancour and bitterness. "He *screamed* at us," they said indignantly. Moreover, they had a deep religious

sense. For Dad, and hundreds like him, politics were a kind of religion, and indeed religion sometimes a kind of politics. They applauded warmly when I finished, and we promised to come back before the campaign was over. "That was grand, me boy," said Jack Wilkins, as we struggled into top gear. "We'll get there all right, we'll get there."

When at last, with a crowded meeting in a Miners' Hut, and a speech to a fortuitous handful of passers-by in the streets of Staple Hill, the night's round ended, there was still the length of Bristol to drive through and the car to garage, before I reached the small private hotel where my wife was sitting up for me with sausage rolls and cocoa. She couldn't come to many of our meetings at that election, and that was my chief handicap. I told her that all had gone well, but I already knew enough about Elections to be aware that meetings, even when they are large and enthusiastic meetings, mean next to nothing. Any party, particularly the Labour Party, whose speakers were so rarely interrupted, can manage enthusiastic meetings. What wins elections is years of preparatory organisation. And of organisation we were all but destitute. The constituency had been fought at the last Election but one, but from that campaign scarcely a vestige of assets survived. Only gradually did I recognise the extent of the lacunæ. In the small docking town, in the three mining villages (though the majority of the miners were then Liberals) there were at least supporters whose addresses were known to us. Elsewhere, as far as we were concerned, there were only the great open spaces. And on Sundays

Mr. Randall would summon me from my hard-earned rest and we would drive out in the Occasional Four in search of remote villages at which unreliable second-hand information dubiously asserted that there was a sympathiser who might be ready to take the chair for us. Sometimes the sympathiser proved to be non-existent; sometimes he existed but was not a sympathiser; sometimes he was out, and occasionally we merely lost ourselves looking for him. All this meant a long day at the wheel; the weather, it is true, was pleasant and Mr. Randall knew a great deal of local history, but this was not exactly a candidate's work. Inevitably our organisation was everywhere of the same shadowy nature. Nor were we well qualified to improvise a new one. All our active supporters at this Election were wage-earners, and the wage-earner, though patient, humorous, courageous and kind, is not usually trained to initiative. Among wage-earners there was a marked distinction. Railwaymen abounded with initiative and energy. Dockers had a sturdy independence of their own. But factory hands were apt to be floored by the slightest departure from the normal. A former chairman, who had been placed in charge of one of our two chief committee-rooms, was uncertain what answer to give to some trivial question on an official form. He walked two and a half miles, both ways, to the next committee-room for advice. There was a telephone on his desk, but he was not accustomed to telephones. Buses ran every few minutes. But he preferred to walk.

We relied on indigenous speakers. No one from outside came to help us, nor did we then particularly

desire outside help. Despite the Sunday researches of Mr. Randall and myself, we could rarely produce a local chairman. And so every evening much the same team would set out, to disperse itself, according to written instructions, over the night's fixtures, which occasionally, by a slight topographical error, lay so far apart as to make co-ordination impossible. There would be Mr. Giles, a sturdy old-age pensioner with snow-white hair, whose speech was a resonant summary of the misdeeds of former employers. "Oh! They're a lovely lot, aren't they?" he would ejaculate cheerfully, as he strode up and down the platform. And the market-gardener who could never make a speech, because he had always to wear a cap, several sizes too big for him, indoors. "It's me head," he would explain apologetically, baring a gleaming bald surface. "But I'm hoping it'll sprout soon." There was the jovial confectioner from Kingswood of course, kid-gloved and bowler hatted, who frequently took the chair, and shook with irrepressible mirth if the audience shouted at him. For though, as I have said, I scarcely once heard an unmannerly interruption myself, I must admit that my friend the confectioner did sometimes gleefully report disturbances among his audience. But since our nebulous arrangements often required him to speak for something like an hour to village worthies who had come to see the candidate, and since his platform style at the best of times consisted mainly of back chat with the audience, I hardly think that a few expressions of impatience can be counted seriously against the electors. His repertoire was invariable. It began with a story about a man who

was retained by a seaside resort to rescue bathers from drowning, and found himself hauling from the water a man whose false arm came off in the rescuer's hand. He then clutched his leg. "My friends it was a wooden leg and came off in his hands. He seized his other leg, but that too, was wooden. In despair, my friends, he grasped the drowning man's hair. It was a wig, and came off in his hand. My friends, how can we save the people if the people don't hold together?" This always went with a roar, but from this point onwards the speaker would become progressively gravelled for matter and would alternate between biblical denunciation of "my friends" for their imperviousness to the light, and low comedy rhetorical questions in broad Cockney which he would fling into the auditorium, shaking with genial laughter when they provoked a damaging retort. Jack Wilkins of course would be there too, with his melancholy and sensitive countenance and his unfailing optimism. In spite of his neuritis he liked to be out with us, whatever the weather and even if he was not going to speak. Jack remembered the first Socialist meeting in Bristol and saw the present campaign in the reflected light of earlier glories. During the war he had impoverished himself—he was a tailor's cutter, now coming to the end of his working days—by refusing to work on military uniforms. "'Anything for me to-day?' I used to say, and they'd say, 'No, Mr. Wilkins, nothing to-day.' But I didn't care. It was me principles, you see, Godfrey, me boy." He was a loyal churchman, and though he did not know so much local history as Mr. Randall, like

so many working-class Socialists he had a wholesome reverence for tradition; in a sense indeed his politics themselves were loyalty to the past. He was dauntless as well as unquenchably optimistic. Nettled by some farmer on a visit to the neighbouring countryside, he had insisted, though he had all and more than his trade's proverbial innocence of horsemanship, on mounting a mettlesome steed and leaping the farmyard hedge. "God bless you, Godfrey, me boy," he would say, as we parted for the night. "Ye're doing fine."

And there was burly Mr. Martin with the specially inscribed watch presented him when he left the police force. "Martin, they said—it's the gospel truth I'm telling you, Mr. Elton—Martin, you're a credit to the force. 'Guess what I've got here,' I said to my sweetheart when I took it home." Something of the policeman lingered about Mr. Martin's speeches. He addressed his audiences as if daring them not to come quietly.

Blinking in the sudden light, one would come in late, perhaps an hour late, after another impatient scurry through dark and devious lanes, to the stuffy school-room, with the benchful of restless children in front, the patient wooden countenances of the village elders at the back, a non-committal row of young men in scarves and caps by the door, and here and there perhaps a lonely but convinced supporter, whose face would light with a solemn religious glow as one began to speak. Once or twice the local squire sits in the front row, rigid with disapproval, a respectful space left clear around him. The speaker gratefully breaks off, "But here comes our candidate;

I am sure you all want to hear what he has to say." There is a little hesitating applause, I toss my overcoat on to a chair, and begin. . . . As the campaign proceeded, I realised that there were issues, possibly important issues, nominally before the country, which were never going to be mentioned at our meetings. After all, one couldn't wholly omit the one or two major controversies which every one was presumably interested in—those and the general moral outlook, so to speak, of the speaker on Society, which was the core of the whole business. And by the time one had finished with those there was no time left, except to answer questions and make a dash for the next meeting. And scarcely ever did any one ask questions on those secondary topics. In fact, the miniature democracy of my constituency was functioning according to plan. To believe in democracy, it is not necessary to believe that the people is capable of forming opinions worth having on technical problems. What the people can do is to judge a broad moral issue more wisely than any collection of experts that could be assembled. The question answered at each General Election is merely this; present circumstances being what they are, and given the broad lines on which, if future circumstances allow, as they probably will not, it is likely to legislate, which set (or, if you prefer it, which gang) of leaders will you prefer? The main issue being slightly complicated in the several constituencies by the subsidiary question, will you allow your opinion of the local rivals to override your opinion of the national rivals? To these interlocking questions, it seemed to me, our meetings

gave the electors every opportunity of providing a satisfactory answer.

Since no stars from the outer world visited us during the Election, I had very little first-hand idea as yet of what the propagandists of the Party were like. I had seen something of one or two of the leaders, I had begun to learn to know the unsurpassable rank and file. At both extremities the Party seemed exceptionally healthy. What of that which lay between? One glimpse came my way during the election. There was a demonstration in the largest Bristol picture house addressed by the Bristol Labour candidates, and as a near neighbour I was invited to speak too. I listened attentively from my seat on the platform, particularly to Walter Ayles, who was by way of being the most theoretical of the Bristol men. He had won North Bristol in 1923 and was to lose it in 1924. Mr. Ayles was an ardent pacifist, and in 1924 pacifism was not, as it is now, a novel and aggressive cult; it was still no more than an unpopular survival of the Great War. The speaker had a distinguished presence, a pleasant tenor voice and a trick of rocking on his heels as he spoke. He kept his hands mostly in the side pockets of his jacket. "I go to the quays of Antwerp," he cried (in effect), "and I see there human beings going about their business as they go about their business on the quays of Bristol, human beings just like you and me. I go to Paris and stand in the Bois de Boulogne and what do I see? Once again human beings exactly the same, save that they speak a different language, as you and I." And he proceeded to take his audience on a rapid Cook's tour of the

principal capitals of Europe, punctuated by the same constant refrain. Everywhere humanity is the same. The conclusion was obvious, why can we not all live together in perpetual amity? And if the step to the logical corollary—under another Labour Government we all shall—was a trifle difficult to follow, it was perfectly adequate, no doubt, for an Election. Indeed the whole speech, delivered with much emotional eloquence, had a great success. All the same—everywhere humanity is the same. In a sense it was quite true of course. And yet, supposing you inserted a negative. “Everywhere humanity is different.” That, surely, was at least equally true. The brotherhood of man, and particularly the brotherhood of the working classes which is sometimes deduced from it! The doctrine that a Gloucestershire wage-earner must necessarily feel warmer sympathy for Chechoslovakian cab-drivers, the peasants of sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, and negro dock hands in Liberia, than for his own neighbours, fellow-members of Church and cricket club—it had always seemed to me extraordinarily difficult to swallow. Why, at heart, though they may not always have known it, the very men who had applauded the speech were passionately English; all their prejudices and loyalties were English; whatever might be said on platforms, whatever some of them might say themselves, England came first with them and the sub-Carpathian Ruthenians nowhere. If it were not so, they would be mere bloodless analogies of those promoters of good causes, those life-long sitters on reforming committees, whose own families are devastated areas.

And then one morning towards the end of the campaign the posters announced the Zinovieff letter. I glanced at the papers without much interest. It was all very obscure. The Soviet Foreign Secretary had written a letter to somebody in Great Britain and Mr. MacDonald, or if not Mr. MacDonald, somebody else, had not published, or had not answered, it soon enough. It really didn't seem very important, and I doubt whether, to the last, the electors in general had a notion what all the subsequent fuss was about—save that somehow or other the Labour Government was alleged to have been mysteriously subservient to Russia. I was quite ready to believe that Zinovieff was anxious to cause mischief in England; stirring up trouble in other countries, seemed, apart from shooting and starving its own subjects, to be the principal occupation of the Russian Government. But it seemed extravagantly unlikely that Mr. MacDonald had been over friendly to Moscow. After all, it had been MacDonald who killed British Communism. Between 1918 and 1922 he had fought it trucelessly within the British Labour Party. Nor had the issue of that contest been by any means a foregone conclusion. Moscow had placed MacDonald on the Index. He was out of Parliament, his chief hope of getting back was the I.L.P. and the Scottish I.L.P. had already gone Communist. None the less, he had defied Communism and smitten it hip and thigh, and it had at once degenerated into what it still is, a handful of æsthetes and undergraduates in a few secluded nooks, and in the country at large no more than an occasional nuisance at meetings. MacDonald was

certainly not likely to have been over-deferential to the Bolshies. In any case, I doubt whether the Red Letter made much difference to the result of the Election. Afterwards, it is true, the Labour Party persuaded itself that only an impudent forgery had cheated it of certain victory. But then, since 1922, the Labour Party has always tended to find its reverses inexplicable, save on the assumption of the fraudulence of its opponents. In 1931 indeed a special terminology was coined, and that and most subsequent Labour defeats became mysteriously "Ramps"—("Ramp-slope, inclined plane joining two levels of ground, esp. in fortification, or of wall-coping; difference in level between opposite abutments of rampart arch; upward bend in stair-rails")—at first Bankers' Ramps, but eventually just Ramps. This conception, so unflattering to democracy, of a constantly deluded electorate, was in its infancy in 1924. Zinovieff may have lost us some Liberal votes in Gloucestershire, but there was little evidence that I could see that any one, except the Pressmen, was excited about him.

When the count came, we proved to have increased our poll from five thousand to six thousand, the Liberal, with ten thousand, had lost his seat, the Conservative, with twelve thousand, was in. As far as the candidates were concerned it had been an exemplary contest. Throughout, all three had referred to each other with studied old-world courtliness. As we walked across the school-yard after the count, a virago, who had been laying wait for us, shook her fist at me and screamed, "Thank God ye were beaten. How d'you like the bottom of the poll? Down with Labour!" And she went off

into eldritch screeches of laughter. With wild eyes and flying hair, she might almost have been one of the furies of the French Revolution. "All right, old girl. *You're* finished anyway," rejoined Jack Wilkins cheerfully. "She's a Liberal," he explained to me. And he went on in a hoarse, earnest undertone (it was cold and he pulled his thin raincoat more closely round him), "You done fine, boy. Don't you give up. You stick to us and we'll stick to you. We'll be there, yet; you mark Jack's words."

At first the charming old boot-operative and his wife, with whom I was spending the night, had seemed a little diffident. They had not been sure that I should be comfortable. But now we were getting on famously. They always remembered, they said, how a real gentleman, an acquaintance of theirs, had once visited them. "It makes you feel a bit down at first. But it isn't the real gentlemen as would mind coming. It's those that are a little bit up." How completely I knew what they meant! Those that are a little bit up! It was easy to get to know the miners, the factory hands, the agricultural labourers, in whose houses I was so often staying now. They had the exquisite unaffected manners of the simple, the best manners that there are. They did not worry what you would think of them, all they cared about was to make you comfortable. But the working man who had made money was a very different customer. There had been supper, for example, with a small manufacturer, who had started life as a factory hand and was now living in ugly discomfort in a Georgian squire's house, which

had somehow escaped demolition when the industrial streets lapped slowly over the squire's acres. In the raw hideousness of what had once been a dignified eighteenth century drawing-room, my hostess, the daughter of the house, waited self-consciously on the sofa. Her hands were clasped on her lap, her eyes downcast, she did not stir as the door opened, or as I crossed the room towards her. Even when I came to anchor expectantly immediately above her, she sat on like a waxwork, neither moving nor looking up. Only when, some seconds later, her father's voice announced me, did she start artificially into life, and rise simpering from the sofa. Poor girl, some one must have been teaching her gentility.

For the seven years which followed the Election of 1924, I nursed, as the curious technical phrase has it, my Gloucestershire constituency. Propagandists, particularly Labour propagandists, often speak of their work as educational. I will not answer for how much any one else learned from my nursing, but I am certain that nobody learned as much as I did. For I learned once and for all to love and, I think, to understand the plain men and women who are England. This is the core of all politics and all history. These miners and boot operatives and market-gardeners and their wives and children, the ultimate foundation on which all Government rests, the ultimate standard by which all policy is judged, how often have I thought of them, and their slow, instinctive judgments, as I read some pompous collective manifesto by the self-appointed guardians of British morality, or some self-tortured intellectual's brilliant political vapourings—and how

often at that testing mental reference the rounded sentences of the letter to *The Times*, the neurotic brilliance of the highbrow weekly, have seemed to dislimn like mist melting from a rock. Yes, I learned a great deal, as much perhaps as I have learned anywhere, save in my own house. It was not an easy lesson to learn. Even physically there were difficulties. Often I would drive over from Oxford for a meeting or two, and get back the same night. One could start at three or later, and drive two and a half hours—the market place of Faringdon, Lechlade and the William Morris country, the infant Thames, Cirencester and its noble church, grey Tetbury and the pleasant hunting country beyond, the long market street of Chipping Sodbury, the approaches to Bristol. A cup of tea and a talk and off, a handful of supporters in the car, perhaps to some lonely agricultural village. “There are two people you must call on here, Mr. Elton.” And then one of my companions bawling lustily on the margin of an empty village green, no audience save the rest of our car load and a cow; the gradual muster of watchful non-committal villagers, a dozen or so when I begin; an occasional car passing on the high road with a backward craning of heads as it vanishes round the corner; the two gaffers who stand motionless just out of earshot, gazing; and the gaffer beyond them in the middle distance, and the gaffer who leans intently over a gate on the far horizon; the chat when the meeting is over with the one or two who have been brave enough to linger on; the drive to another village, and another, and another, and all to do over again; the return to our starting-place;

"now do just stay for a cup of tea, it'll put strength in you for your drive back;" the belated departure. The roads will be dark and empty now, unless it is a Saturday night and for a few miles there will be the headlights of the charabancs on their way back to Bristol. Tetbury, Cirencester, Lechlade, Faringdon; often I could drive the whole way back without stopping. If drowsiness surged up, one could always sing or pinch oneself or, if it was winter, open the windscreen and let the ice-cold air rush in. But there are few more exacting tasks than fighting sleep, and sometimes I would have to stop every now and again and walk up and down to drive off the creeping numbness. Occasionally, towards the end of the journey, I have had to stop half a dozen times in three miles or less. And once or twice I reached a condition in which it was no longer any use stopping, and I could see buses on the road ahead of me, buses on whose sides I could even read the advertisements, buses which, as I met them, proved not to be there. These were the more uncomfortable expeditions. Occasionally of course I set forth from my parents' house in Gloucestershire, comparatively near at hand. Once or twice I was even driven by a chauffeur. And often I would stay some days on end in the constituency and get through a crowded programme of visits, bazaar openings, and midday and evening meetings. But it is the occasional flying raid from Oxford which I remember now as characteristic. Often I would have had tea at home before I started, but as I ate sandwiches in the hall in the small hours on my return, it would seem as if I had been away an age, and next day, in a propitiatory gesture to the

tutelar deities of the cloisters, I would make a point of poring with redoubled studiousness over the French Revolution or the correspondence of Disraeli. I remember in a moment of compunction asking Canon Streeter what he thought of these extra-academic activities. It was about the time that he was finishing *Reality* and I fancy that some of the page proofs were littered, round the inevitable tray of cocoa and biscuits, on the floor. To the world—to all parts of the world, indeed, by now—Streeter was a Biblical scholar and a modernist theologian. This was not the side of him which attracted me personally, for on the whole, if my simple beliefs are to be undermined, I prefer the undermining not to be done by a beneficed clergyman of the Church from which I learnt them. But in his own circle Streeter was something much more attractive than a modernist theologian. He possessed a combination of unworldliness and shrewdness which made him the ideal counsellor. You would find him sitting over his tray of tea or cocoa, every articulation of his long, ungainly frame at an unexpected angle. He would peer up over his spectacles and wave you to a chair with a friendly, angular gesture. "Sit ye down, sir—ssh!" That last nervous sibilant, a hissing intake of the breath, it is impossible to transliterate. It was deprecatory, I fancy—apologetic; it always came when he made a joke or uttered a particularly shrewd diagnosis. Indeed Streeter's wisest utterances come back to me now to the accompaniment of those strange, sibilant inhalations and that characteristic angular sawing with bent elbow and long extended palm. Hundreds

of men of all ages must have sought his counsel during his many years at Queen's; as a repository of secrets he must have rivalled a Jesuit confessor. For he was an irresistible combination of unworldliness and commonsense, of simple goodness and universal tolerance. Of what may perhaps be called a sense of style, he was completely destitute, and that, since he was Streeter, merely added to his charm. Of the clothes he wore and the food he ate, of his furniture and his appearance he was obviously scarcely conscious. In others, that indifference might have been repellent, in Streeter it only reminded one that the first Christians had been ordered to take no thought for such matters. He took so little interest, one felt, in himself because he took so much in other people. His lack of physical dignity seemed mysteriously to add to his moral stature. I sometimes think that one of the surest signs of human quality is that ability to turn defect into asset. At different times in my first year at Queen's a couple of friends had stayed with me, both of whom were suffering from obscure and apparently incurable psychological aftereffects of war service. I took them both to see Streeter, and both of them were instantly and miraculously cured; no doubt because he drew confidences from them which, if I know them, they would never have committed to a professional psycholo-analyst. When I asked Streeter whether he thought political activities regrettable in the Fellow of a College, he peered at me over his spectacles with a twinkle. "Far from it," he said. "Far from it. It is good for the undergraduates that some of the people they met here should be in contact with the

outer world—not all, of course, but then there are plenty of the other sort already, plenty. And then, you know, one man may spend his spare time collecting Roman coins; another,” he added, with a mischievous hiss, “reading detective stories. If your hobby, so to speak, is political work, you will probably learn a good deal more from it than you would either from coins or thrillers. But remember”—and here he delved into the cocoa with the loudest hiss of all—“in a University there will always be a lot of people who resent and suspect all outside activities.”

I try sometimes, as I look back, to analyse the art of vote-winning. I suppose it differs from constituency to constituency and from candidate to candidate; and yet I can't help thinking that the elements must be constant. Certainly surprisingly little detailed political argument is needed. In particular the spokesman of an idealistic and almost untried Opposition, such as the Labour Party then was, can allow himself almost infinite licence. He can devote a whole speech to describing some unfair or wasteful feature of “the present system” and the contrast of a society from which it has been eliminated; and it will be quite unnecessary to explain, or indeed to understand, how the elimination is to be effected. The audience will mostly be ready to assume that somehow the new Party will work the miracle; often the word Socialism of itself will span the logical hiatus. Some denunciation of the Government in power, some criticism of “the present system,” a brief reference to the Utopia to be—this will suffice. Such was the recipe for many

of our speeches. And we believed wholeheartedly in all we said: seen from the outer circumference of politics the most sweeping reforms seem child's play. Nor from us, at anyrate, did the electors hear promises of an ever-increasing largesse from the public purse; dole Socialism had not infected us. But for all that, most of those, in any Party, who practise the arts of democracy before public audiences, will promise more than they are likely to be able to perform. It is hard facts which separate the possible from the desirable, and from the circumference a great many of the hard facts are undiscernible. A number of the speeches I listened to in those days consisted almost entirely of emotion. There is no harm in emotion on the platform, provided it is genuine emotion; but it is extraordinarily difficult to tell whether platform emotion is genuine or not. On his feet a speaker may feel with complete sincerity emotions which begin to seep out of him as soon as he sits down. And there are many shades of sincerity. I have known politicians who felt genuine emotion, but felt it self-consciously and encouraged themselves to feel it. One stolid trade-unionist Member of Parliament told me how he had come to the first meeting he addressed in his constituency straight from the sick bed of a child of a local slum. On the platform he had begun to describe the scene and had suddenly broken down. "That was very lucky for me," he added. "It won me the seat." Many of our speeches were strongly religious in tone and phraseology. Now and again a local worthy would even address the audience as "my brothers." I met a parson only the other day, an old member of my

College, who used to come out with us before the election of 1929, and he said that he still occasionally used passages from my speeches in his sermons. I see plenty of grotesque episodes as I look back at those seven years of proselytising. I see myself dozing fitfully in the station waiting-room at Bristol in order to catch a train home in the small hours, after a long and fruitless attempt to negotiate peace terms between our agent and the officers of a branch who had taken a violent dislike to him. Or a packing-case breaking beneath me as I harangued a small open-air meeting at Chipping Sodbury: "that shows," I observe, as I step out of the debris, "how weighty my arguments were." Or the meeting at Charfield from which my wife and I, a baker and a visiting woman speaker were driven in a hired car on an icy winter night and after two hours driving, punctuated by knockings to inquire the way at the doors of dark, silent cottages guarded by clamouring dogs, found ourselves outside the now shuttered hall in which the meeting had been held; the baker, who had to be at work at three in the morning, sang in a rich tenor the whole way back; his name was Paradise and he had been lost. My car, which had crept the last five miles on one cylinder with frequent stops, coming to a definite end of its powers at Faringdon in the small hours and myself borrowing a bicycle from a sleepy young Faringdonian and pedalling the fifteen miles to Oxford in the last grey hour before dawn. Myself, in bed with influenza, receiving a voluminous missive announcing the second disruption in the branch, which had already been once disrupted by the speaker who screamed—

this time because the village schoolmaster's wife had not been chosen to present the bouquet at the bazaar. Myself opening a chapel bazaar and buying flannel pyjamas from the Minister, who had introduced me from the platform as Mr. Hilton. But whatever the frustration and the absurdities, there were always the plain men and women who were our friends. Mrs. Tippetts, the elderly widow, round faced and solemn, who was to be seen at every meeting she could reach on foot or bus, wholly indifferent to the speakers, but for ever stitching at mysterious garments to be sold for the Party funds. At home, still for the Party, she bakes endless cakes and slowly assembles a patchwork quilt. Dad, looking more like Old Bill than ever, presiding at a social, and secretly uneasy as to whether some one will propose dancing to follow. The ailing unemployed van-driver, always cheerful, always turning up at the remotest functions to greet me with, "Well, Elton, how's it going?" The railwaymen on night duty who would give up their sleep to attend a meeting or even, in an agony of shyness, to make a speech. The three signalmen whose influence reached for miles beyond their own villages. The beautiful hospitality of the poor. Jack Wilkins in his thin raincoat. The market-gardener whose head was always going to sprout. The family histories told late at night at village firesides. The unlovely industrial streets, so easy to picture, if one did not know their interiors, as nests of discontent and frustration, yet teeming with full, energetic and courageous lives.

But what wins elections, apart from the foregone

conclusions and the occasional major political convulsions, is for the candidate to get himself known and liked. And so the business of candidature revolves to a surprising degree round the non-political functions. Hence my constant attendance, always with a few words demanded, at British Legion dinners, Hospital bazaars, Adult Schools, P.S.A.'s, Brotherhoods, Chapel fêtes and Chapel services. No one, who has not been brought into direct contact with it, would suspect the intricate network of voluntary organisations in which any populous area in Britain is enmeshed. Much of it centres on religion. From the parent stem of every Chapel, branch Brotherhoods, P.S.A.'s, Sunday Schools, Bazaars and Male Voice Choirs. The Church has its slightly more opulent equivalents. At one remove further there are Adult Schools and W.E.A.'s. Beyond the boundaries of organised Church and Chapel are the Friendly Societies with their various convivial and social activities, the innumerable Bowls, Cricket, Football, Cycling, and Pigeon Fancying Clubs with their periodical dinners, concerts and expeditions, Church and Salvation Armies, Guides, Scouts, British Legion and a score of other flourishing concerns. Almost every household is involved in one or other of them. As a general rule the Liberal and Labour candidates will be invited to the functions which centre on the Chapel, the Conservative to those of the convivial and sporting Societies. The Church, wisely perhaps, holds aloof. I found the Chapel and its offshoots a constantly intriguing study. The Adult School is a close, though not a blood, connection of the Chapel.

The speakers at its weekly meetings are often prominent local lay preachers. An annual programme of subjects for addresses and discussions is published, but the speakers sometimes prefer to deliver an improving talk with little precise reference to the allotted topic. And a considerable proportion of the audience, which consists mostly of middle-aged working men, regards the School rather as a sort of lay service than an opportunity for study. On one of my visits the topic for the week was Evolution. I prepared my address with diffidence and some care, and flattered myself, when it was over, that I had myself mastered, and on the whole explained, the rudiments of Darwinism, neo-Darwinism and anti-Darwinism with reasonable lucidity. The speakers in the discussion which followed politely echoed this optimistic view. Then a grizzled veteran rose. "That was an interesting speech," he said, "a mighty interesting speech; one of the clearest speeches as ever I did hear. And now, my brothers, arising out of the speaker's remarks, I would ask you this. Have you ever considered what a wonderful man Adam was? To think that Adam should have actually invented a different name for every single one of the animals! Is there one of us here could do that? Ah! my brothers, there is much for us to learn from Adam." The audience applauded without a hint of *arrière pensée*. I clapped more heartily than any one. The Chapel itself is almost as much a social, as a religious, organisation. Its social stratifications, too, are clear-cut but unpredictable. In one village all the wage-earners will be Wesleyans and the shopkeepers Congregationalists.

In the next, the shopkeepers will be Wesleyan and the working men Baptists. Occasionally the various sections of the population will be more or less equally distributed between the denominations. The doctrinal distinctions are far from prominent. I have conducted services in chapels of every denomination. At first I expected to find both great variety and great licence in the order of service, but on the pencilled slip handed to me in chapel after chapel appeared the same scarcely varying form. There was less diversity than in the established Church. Often in a tiny village three or even four sparse congregations would be simultaneously conducting these apparently identical forms of worship. For every now and again there will be a breakaway by a tiny sect of new Protestants. On the outskirts of Bristol during those years a little group decided that they would found a chapel of their own. In all the existing denominations there was too much dogma for them, and too many traditional forms. They would preach the Gospel undiluted, they would have no prescribed forms of worship whatever. They were all working men, but slowly they collected funds, slowly and unaided they built their new chapel with their own hands. Several of them were friends of mine, I had long admired and wondered at their zeal; they asked me to address them at one of their opening services. In the little ante-room they handed me a pencilled slip. Not by a hair's breadth did it deviate from the familiar form. The fact is, that behind the rise and decline of the village chapel is the ineradicable individualism of England. Many a natural leader finds no outlet for his full capacities in factory or

field. He turns for self-expression to other channels. A member of the established Church, he finds himself a cypher, its activities dominated by the Vicar and the Colonel's wife. He transfers himself to one of the local chapels and is soon a potent influence in Chapel Society for some miles round. Or he is a Chapel member already, but there are other leaders in his chapel. He finds them not zealous enough, collects some other devotees, and founds a Free Gospel Hall himself. Differing little from the neighbouring chapels save in personelle, during his life-time it will flourish, but after he is gone it will gradually decay. Yet in the intervals of arduous manual labour one such leader may sustain the fortunes of a Chapel, Mission or Gospel Hall for a life-time. Not more foot-pounds of energy and ability go to the career of a Cabinet Minister.

The Chapel as I knew it, was not in the least like the Chapel as I had met it in fiction. I encountered no bigoted hell-fire men, no unctuous or sensual hypocrites. Only a simple, little-lettered society, almost incocent of dogma but doing its best with enviable sincerity to live according to Christian ethics. Sometimes, it is true, it seemed to include in the essential Christian rule practises or ideals, such as Teetotalism or universal Peace, for whose inclusion there is insufficient apostolic authority; but what Christian community has not done that? And to a remarkable degree it did contrive to live up to two practical precepts which cannot surely be far from the core of Christian practise—Be kind, and eschew the sins of the flesh. I am ashamed now to remember that I often conducted whole services in those

Gloucestershire Chapels. It is not that, being a Churchman, perhaps a rather bigoted Churchman, myself need have held me back. I felt the fundamental community of spirit so much more strongly than the divergences of form that I have always suspected since that the obstacles to Christian reunion are not primarily religious. In self-defence too I can always tell myself that these people were my friends, that I admired them and wanted to know them better and that all this would have been so, even if I had not been a political candidate. The fact remains that a political candidate cannot appear anywhere without potentially influencing votes, and if he enters the pulpit he is necessarily prostituting the pulpit to the platform. Indeed one of the most obvious needs of the Labour Party in those days was to win the confidence, and break down the long Liberal tradition, of the Chapels, and I have no doubt that my connection with them, such as it was, was of great service to my Party. Nevertheless, I am clear now that, though it is perfectly legitimate for a politician to figure at a British Legion, or a Cricket Club, festival, partly no doubt because he enjoys them, but partly also because he wishes, for political advantage, to become known to the company there, it is not legitimate with similar motives to figure at a religious service. I am glad that I did, for I learnt much. But I am ashamed too.

Beyond the steadily extending circle of our friends, we had a vast and growing number of acquaintances. With every meeting, with every bazaar and fête, there were more of them. When, six months later, one met them again, one would have liked to be sure

of instantly recognising each one of them, of unfailingly recalling their private histories. Alas! this was not easy. A royal memory for faces is difficult to cultivate; it has probably to be inherited. A Rhodes Scholar who was at Balliol with me had tea with another Rhodes Scholar at Magdalen. The Prince of Wales was there. This was in 1913. Some years after the war he met the Prince again. The Rhodes Scholar was now a Professor in an Australian University. The Prince was opening a new wing, and the Oxford men on the teaching staff were presented. My acquaintance came first. Before any one could speak the Prince said, "How are you, Blank? Do you remember meeting me at tea in Dash's rooms at Magdalen in 1913? And how is Dash?" And he proved to have much later information about Dash than the Professor. He had got both their names of course; the Blank and Dash here are merely evidence that, though the Professor told me his story within the last twelve months, at the moment of writing both the names have escaped me. My memory, though variable, is definitely not royal. When I was at Balliol, the President of the O.U.D.S. asked me to go down to the station one evening to meet William Archer. That eminent Ibsenite dramatic critic was descending on Oxford for the first night of the annual O.U.D.S. production. Unfortunately I had never seen a photograph of William Archer, nor had Gerry Hopkins been able to describe him to me. I scanned the faces of the passengers anxiously. Few of them seemed to me to resemble very convincingly what I imagined that an eminent Ibsenite dramatic critic should look like

Nervously I selected the most likely. A mild, thin, cultured face, I remember, with a suggestion of blonde side-whisker. It proved to be the taxi-man who had just driven me to the station. There are of course substitutes for a royal memory. The late Frank Gray once told me some of his. In sheer vote-gathering technique, Frank Gray, who represented Oxford City for some years, was probably the most enterprising Parliamentary candidate of the century. It was his aim to call on every house, to know every voter, in his constituency. Naturally he was often hailed in the streets by enthusiastic supporters whom, for the moment at any rate, he couldn't tell from Adam. Sometimes he would use Disraeli's gambit. "How goes the enemy?" But sometimes this elicited no clue, and the still anonymous elector would proceed to make some inquiry or request which would obviously make it necessary for his representative to write to him. Even so Gray would not admit defeat. On the contrary, he carried the war boldly into the enemy's territory. "See what a good memory I have," he would say. "Why, I remember not only your name but your address. You live at 1000 Woodstock Road, don't you?" "No, Mr. Gray," the elector would reply, much impressed, "you've got it wrong for once. I live at 1500 Banbury Road." "Tut, tut, so you do," Frank Gray would exclaim, taking a careful note. And when he got home he would turn up the address in the local directory, and at last the missing name would be his.

Every now and again some Personage from the outer political world would descend, to shed the

beams of his prestige upon our lonely furrow. Mr. MacDonald himself came once, soon after the defeat of 1924. He spoke of the difficulties of a new Party and the courage required of its converts. Perorations are not in fashion, but as he began to paint the picture of a forest on the verge of spring it was clear that he was drawing to an end. Somewhere a tree puts out its first buds, unnoticed in the bare forest. Another buds, and yet another, but the skies are grey, the earth iron-bound; the reign of winter is still unbroken. And then suddenly one day as by a miracle, the forest is a mist of green. "Here's to the trees that have the courage to put their buds out first," he said, and sat down.<sup>1</sup> As MacDonald arrived, one of our people advanced effusively to greet him. "I met you at Chester fifteen years ago," he said. "I daresay," replied MacDonald. "I get about a good deal, you know." And I remembered a description, in a book of Charles Whibley's, of how, on Swindon platform, a stranger had hustled up to shake Disraeli by the hand. "Sir, I do not know you," replied the great man. But that had been before the era of the mass suffrage. And the author mischievously adds that Mr. Gladstone would have dropped his umbrella and squeezed the stranger's hand in both his own. Malcolm MacDonald too came often, even then as lucid on the platform and as shrewd in counsel as any one in politics. But until 1929 he was not yet a Member. He might have entered the House while still an undergraduate, as the young man who

<sup>1</sup> This is an improved variant, I have since realised, of a passage from a speech of Jaurès referred to by MacDonald in his *Wanderings and Excursions*.

defeated Winston Churchill at Leicester, but he had refused the safe seat, preferring in the older tradition to win his own victories. Kenneth Lindsay chatted colloquially—a rare art—from the platform and Buck de la Warr came too, stabbing with minatory forefinger as he drove his points home to a gaping rural audience, which obviously had its work cut out to reconcile the cheerful and decorative young earl with his eulogy of the advantages of nationalising the land. Andrew McLaren, high priest of the Single Tax and most gifted of all speakers in the open air, came once and again, always without luggage, always racily scarifying Socialism and Socialists all the long drive down, always doing what he liked with any audience anywhere. Several Trade Union members made their solid, fighting speeches, Sir Henry Slesser told the audience at a fête that the principle that every human soul is equal before God must be translated into politics, and Mr. Ernest Bevin strode formidably in to open a bazaar. Nor were others wanting, but the rising intellectuals of the Party, I found, were usually too fully engaged to visit a backward area.

For four years there was no vestige of tangible proof that all our efforts had begun to make the slightest impression on the electorate. And then, towards the end of 1928, evidence began suddenly to accumulate. Beneath the surface the mysterious tides of opinion had slowly begun to turn. I remember the first straw discernible upon the current. At a poultry show in the autumn I fell into conversation with an inspector of police. "Most of the folk in my road are going over to your

way of thinking," he said. Very slowly our Branches began to swell. The election campaign began in the early summer of 1929 and at the end of the first week it was obvious that the tide was rapidly gathering impetus. Everywhere strangers began to greet me with "I'm going to vote for you this time." No one outside the division had supposed we could get within five thousand of the winner. But in fact only three obstacles now seriously impeded us. The chief was that soon after the Election of 1924 a new Liberal had settled in the constituency, to devote himself solely to wooing the electors. It was difficult to compete with a whole-time candidature. Even so, as it turned out, we should probably have won, but for two minor impediments. For a year or two before the Election we had had no professional agent; we procured one on the eve of the campaign. This was lack of faith. We had always been optimists, but if we had had any idea how close we were to come to victory, we should doubtless have beggared ourselves, if necessary, to maintain an agent. (Professional agents however are sometimes an inexhaustible source of local controversy and we might not have been so fortunate, if we had procured one earlier, as we proved in an eleventh-hour selection.) Even so, we might have won, but for a third deficiency. We had practically no cars. There were thirty of our opponents' to every one of ours. In a close fight in a struggling constituency such a disparity may be decisive. While the count went on in the Elementary School at Staple Hill we ate sandwiches with my Conservative opponent in an unoccupied class room. At intervals a clerk would

put his head in and announce, "You have all three reached ten thousand," and "You have all reached eleven thousand." At last we had all three reached thirteen thousand and there were only a few hundred votes left. When the end came the Conservative had won again. All three totals were between thirteen thousand and thirteen thousand five hundred. Experts considered it the most remarkable result of the General Election. Jack Wilkins was torn between despair and exultation. "We'll be there next time, me boy," he said.

After the election we allowed ourselves no respite. Within a month of the Election we were at it again. We redoubled our efforts. In the next two years, despite the ominous rise in unemployment figures, we increased our membership by a hundred per cent. We formed a flourishing youth section, which danced at regular intervals. I surveyed them one evening with admiration. A score of pretty girls in charming evening dresses; yet most of them were children of the unemployed. A few weeks later, and it was August, 1931.

. . . . .

In those seven years I had learnt that the common people of England are fundamentally and impregnably sound—stout of heart, shrewd of judgment, cheerful, patient, humorous, easy-going and kind. Of the Scotch and Welsh I was not in so favourable a position to judge, but I believed that any movement or Party which rested upon the will of the English masses was not likely to go far astray. The only danger which I thought I had discerned was that, owing to a laziness and a blur of sentiment

in the English mind, they might be too ready to assume that the nostrums of every theorist who wore their colours did in fact represent their own eminently realistic objectives. During these seven years, however, I had viewed the new Party elsewhere than from the circumference.

In March of 1926 a small group of Labour candidates began to meet occasionally for dinner at the Ship in Whitehall. These gatherings went on for some while and eventually grew into an official Candidates Association which, I believe, still exists. In those earliest days, however, less than a dozen used to dine, and these included Oswald Mosley, John Strachey, Malcolm MacDonald, Kenneth Lindsay, Creech Jones, Sir Richard Rees, George Middleton, J. R. Oldfield and myself. It will be seen that with Mosley Fascist, Strachey Communist, Malcolm MacDonald, Kenneth Lindsay and myself in the National alliance, and Middleton, as First Church Estates Commissioner, out of politics, the mortality in Labour allegiance has been high. But these after all are dissolvent years. And as I look back at those of the politicians among my undergraduate contemporaries who are still political to-day, I see much the same kaleidoscopic effect. Kingsley Griffiths, silver-tongued Socialist and President of the Union, is silver-tongued still, but now Liberal Member for East Middlesbrough; Harry Strauss, who seconded a Socialist motion in the Union which Barrington Ward had ordained that I should move, and who still has one of the clearest heads that I have watched at work, is Conservative Member for Norwich; A. P. Herbert,

together with whom I was defeated for the Secretaryship, was then a Conservative, but is now, more significantly, just A. P. Herbert. Philip Guedalla was brilliant, epigrammatic and Liberal, and G. D. H. Cole was writing two or three Socialist classics at once; these at least have both run true to early form. The most remarkable aberration perhaps was that of a slim, romantic young Anglo-Catholic, champion then of all the most impossible Tory loyalties. Years after the War I met him again. The picturesque and visionary idealist—was now a corpulent and jovial man of the world and a Labour candidate. He had exactly reversed the traditional process; he had shed his idealisms but he had moved to the left. The Ship's company had not the same pretext of youth for the subsequent transfer of so many of its members to other vessels, but unheard of storms were to sweep the political seas upon which they were setting sail. Oswald Mosley, though he was just then a candidate, had already been a Member of Parliament, first Conservative and then Independent, and in 1926 he was already well known. Even without his brilliance, his reputation would have made him the most prominent member of the little group. With a black felt hat worn jauntily on one side and his dark, somewhat saturnine, distinction, he seemed still, as he moved Leftward, the young man of fashion, whose photograph only a short while ago had been prominent in the Society weeklies. He had already been the coming young man, the future Prime Minister, of the Conservatives. In a few months he would be the coming man, the future Prime

Minister, of the Labour Party. But he was in a hurry, perhaps in too much of a hurry. He had dynamic force, he was already revolving strokes of high policy, but in the lesser and immediate obstacles he seemed less interested. It was much the same, it seemed to me, with his personal relations. He concentrated his gaze on the powerful, on those with whom his career would bring him into contact; with unimportant people he seemed not to be sufficiently concerned. It was as if he stood already high on a ladder, of which the lower rungs were insecure or missing. John Strachey at that time was Mosley's *fidus Achates*. If Mosley had the air of being a ruthless man of action, Strachey was rather the ruthless intellectual. Mosley was at any rate interested in important people—his enemies said, because he was a careerist. But Strachey seemed indifferent even to important people; he seemed less interested in fact in human beings than in Plans. No one accused him of personal ambition; what he wanted was to get things done, but they would be ruthless, impersonal things. He was a convinced apostle of class-consciousness, though, like almost every other exponent of this theory I have met, he did not himself belong to the class of which he felt it so necessary to be conscious—and he could scarcely conceal his impatience when I enlarged on my own idea of a Party of all classes united against the Profiteer. This conception of a united nation was a heresy treated with open scorn by all who accepted the Victorian ideal of truceless and perpetual domestic strife which Marx had imported from the continent. None the less it seemed to me a good deal

more English, and as I pictured the visionary class war of the London intellectuals against the homely background of Jack Wilkins and Mrs. Tippetts and my Labour friends in the west country, I had little doubt which of the two ideals would survive.

The Members of Parliament who came down to speak in my constituency naturally kept much more closely to the immediate than our eclectic conclave at the Ship. I admired the lively tang, the homely illustrations, with which they expounded the controversies of the moment. Nevertheless as time went on I became aware of one vast blind spot. The British Dominions were never mentioned. Reticence as to the Colonies I could understand, for although neither international Socialism nor the alien doctrines of Marx had ever rooted on this side of the Channel, certain stunted seedlings from continental stock maintained themselves precariously on British soil, polite if irrational concessions to the rejected creed. One of these was the belief that all subject and backward races are cruelly exploited by bloodthirsty capitalists and that the wage-earners of Britain are their loving brothers. Theoretically Labour politicians were for instantly freeing the African negro from his British oppressors. In practise, it was easy to understand, the subject was best left discreetly alone. For one thing, the British wage-earner took remarkably little interest in African negroes. For another, he had no desire whatever to raise their standard of living, if it meant lowering his own. But if there seemed good reason for reticence as to the Colonial Empire, there seemed no reason at all for so consistently omitting the Dominions from

every calculation of the future. For the Dominions, it seemed to be felt, one should feel faintly apologetic. Vaguely but compromisingly, they were associated with Empire, and, worse, with imperialists. Full-blooded foreigners one must always be ready to embrace, but Canadians or Australians were best discreetly forgotten. I did not feel this way myself about either Colonies or Dominions. I had no wish to forget the British Empire, still less to liquidate it. There, after all, was half the population of the globe; it hardly seemed rational to ignore them. Nor was I in the least disposed to apologise for the existence of either. Together, they seemed likely to be regarded by posterity as by far the greatest achievement of the British, and perhaps of any, people. The brightest hope for the world seemed to me to be the revival and diffusion of the British cult of liberty and tolerance, and I did not see much prospect of that, save in intimate understanding and co-operation between ourselves and the British overseas. I had no doubt that the rank and file of the Party would share this view, if they were allowed to hear something of the facts. But even with my almost mystic faith in the instinct of the masses, I could not expect them to judge rightly on a subject on which almost all their leaders preserved an unbroken silence.

But the young men who foregathered at the Ship, and indeed all the many practising politicians I was meeting now, were at least in active contact with humanity. But now in growing numbers the Party also embraced the mere intellectuals, unmatured by any form of practical experience. The

millennial language, the apparently irresistible advance of Labour had swept them into its ranks since the War. Many of them were Radicals in the truest sense; they believed, that is, that one root and branch specific must cure for ever all the ills of humanity. Often, of course, the specific would be Nationalisation, but sometimes it was scarcely political at all and they had become clamorous skirmishers on the outskirts of politics because they were anti-vaccinationists, pacifists, vegetarians or New Moralists. Occasionally, too, they would be primarily men with a grievance; persons of high intelligence, for example, whom some darkness of fortune, some lack of accommodation in themselves, had balked of distinction; or else some minor resentment—they had quarrelled with parents or been bullied at school or perhaps it was merely that they disliked huntin' and shootin' folk—had cast them permanently for anti-Government men, certain in due course to assail Labour, if it were in power, as vehemently as they now belaboured its opponents. But beneath all their heterogeneous resentments and idealisms they were intellectuals. It is an unsatisfactory definition, I know; I am nor sure that I do not prefer Napoleon's "ideologue." Thomas Hardy and the late Earl of Oxford and Asquith were undoubtedly intellectual, yet undoubtedly nobody would describe them as intellectuals—presumably because first-rate creative achievement demands will-power, intuition and emotion as well as intellect. An intellectual has too much intellect in proportion to these other qualities, too much intelligence and too little character. An

intellectual is only completely at home among ideas—and words. Better still perhaps, an intellectual *thinks* of himself, or herself, as an intellectual. But perhaps it is sufficient that every one recognises an intellectual when he meets one. The people of whom I am speaking were, I do not know how to put it better, curiously unrooted. It was that rootlessness which made them such ready victims of the facile yet despairing cynicism which stamped itself so deeply on the later 'twenties. They had no roots in tradition; for it was part of their creed that all long-descended faith or morality must necessarily be an imposture. Curiously often too they seemed to have no roots in their country itself; urban or suburban, they were apt to prefer flats to homes. A remarkable proportion of them had no roots in family either. Perhaps that is fundamental. They had failed to live happily with a wife, to beget and rear a contented family of children. It is astonishing to reflect how many of those who are confidently prepared to set the whole world to rights, have themselves failed in the first and simplest, if the most exacting, task of man. The Utopians whose rigid Plans for the salvation of humanity cut ruthlessly across the most fundamental human instincts and affections, have only too often shown themselves, in private, wholly indifferent to the first claims of human relationship. I have always believed that it is impossible to arrive at any sound political philosophy unless one has thought outward from the family. A man's first duty, before he starts reforming his town, his country or the universe is to those of his own household. He has

little right to offer himself on platforms as champion of the oppressed in every quarter of the globe, if he has already made of his own home a devastated area. Nor can he hope to understand the problems of humanity unless he first surveys them through the windows of his own house, and feels for those whom he has never seen primarily because he has felt, more deeply, for his own mother, his own wife or his own children, and can see in the nameless masses above all the wives, mothers and children of other people. If he cannot see mankind thus personally, mankind will soon become for him a mere graph in a text book, the mechanical material of bloodless intellectualist theory. Every now and again a through-paced intellectual would get himself adopted as a Labour candidate. The subsequent process of disillusionment, in candidate and supporters, was usually both amusing and instructive. The man of theory would sometimes begin by assuming that Labour votes were automatically to be had for any doctrine which wore the current stamp of Progress. Having lived hitherto in a select circle of the like-minded, he had little notion what unselect humanity thought or felt. Occasionally nemesis came quickly. One candidate expounded in print his belief in promiscuous sexual intercourse, commending it with special insistence to the very young. The poor man was genuinely surprised and pained when his supporters, most of them devoted members of local chapel or church, flung him indignantly from his candidature.

Then there were the annual Party Conferences. The more affluent assembling, with the Party chiefs,

at the local Grand or Royal. The less prosperous, the Clydesiders, the trade unionists, the agents dispersed among the lesser hostelrys and lodging-houses. The anxious preliminary discussions; will it be a "good" Conference—will the Executive, that is, creditably defeat the year's rebellion? For rebel there inevitably is. During these years there is Maxton, and later Mosley, to fill that ageless rôle, to provoke the preliminary flutter of apprehension and to sustain the inevitable defeat. At the Llandudno Conference of 1930 all the familiar characteristics were concentrated in specially dramatic guise. It was to be the last Conference of the old dispensation. When the next year's Conference assembled at another holiday resort, the leaders of the Party and a number of humbler adherents, including myself, would have been expelled, and the old Labour Party would have passed into history. My wife and I travelled to Llandudno by train that October, beguiling part of the long journey by combining with Lord and Lady Sanderson to master the crossword in *The Times*. I had been to only one Conference before but as soon as we set foot in Llandudno I recognised that all Conferences must be irretrievably and for ever the same. Here was Mr. Arthur Greenwood assuring the Sandersons that it was going to be a "good" Conference. Here were the animated smoking-room cabals. Here was Mr. Arthur Henderson, so efficient, so genial, so accessible, that you would feel that you knew him better in an hour than you could know MacDonald in a year; only the process would not be so interesting. Here were the supporters of Sir Oswald Mosley

circulating discreetly from group to group. For this year there were to be two rebels; not only Maxton but Mosley. One was accustomed to Maxton in the rôle. In the House he was said to be capable of compelling oratory. These powers were not displayed in the speeches I heard at the Conferences. In the House, it was also said, however much you disapproved of Maxton's views, you could not help being captivated by the man. I had never met him myself and, undistracted by his personal qualities, I was left at liberty to dislike his views. The class-war men had not come my way in Gloucestershire. And for myself I believed wholeheartedly in national unity, that the nation in a profound and spiritual sense is one and that its supreme interests are the common interests of all of us. The national unity of war-time had not only won the War, it had seemed to cleanse and invigorate the very air we breathed. But for Maxton and his friends there seemed to be no nation, only a fortuitous congeries of warring atoms, a perpetual death-struggle of workers and capitalists—two classes of which I was never able to obtain the same definition from two successive apostles of the class-war. Accordingly when, sweeping back his celebrated bobbed hair and crouching upon the rostrum as if to peer menacingly into the faces of the front row of his audience, Maxton unleashed yet another foredoomed assault upon the leadership of the Party, I listened without enthusiasm and was glad that in what he said there was neither the fire of oratory nor the compulsion of intellectual power. However, Maxton was not in the centre of the stage just now.

This was Mosley's year. His brief impatient career in the Labour Party was almost over now. Almost as soon as he entered the Party, Local Labour Parties had fought to secure him as their candidate. There had been no interval of apprenticeship. Soon he was as popular a platform figure as any one in the Party. In the Government of 1929 he was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, specially charged, with Mr. Thomas and Mr. Johnston, with the dire problem of unemployment. For months he was said to have bombarded Mr. Thomas with memoranda. At last the final memorandum was submitted to the Cabinet itself and after lying with it, unacted on by the Government and unheard of by the outer world, for many weeks, it had suddenly emerged as a major Press sensation. Before long it had torn the Party with bitter dissension. Mosley's opponents denounced the memorandum as a mere instrument of his inordinate personal ambitions, his friends were convinced that it contained a sovereign cure for unemployment. Neither supporter nor opponent had read it. At last Mosley had decided to appeal from Cabinet and Parliament to the constituencies. Copies of his Memorandum had been sent to the Secretary of every local Party, inviting them to instruct their delegates to support it at the Conference. It was known that Mosley's popularity and the sense of frustration inspired by the soaring totals of unemployment had already won the Memorandum a formidable following. This was the challenge to the leadership at Llandudno. In calmer moments every one who knew the Labour Party was aware that it always followed its leaders;

all Conferences were "good" Conferences. Nevertheless Mosley was a new and an unusually powerful challenger; the Conference might be not nearly so good as usual. In the agreeable flutter of anticipation which precedes a Conference it even seemed as if it might not be good at all.

Mr. MacDonald came to Llandudno that Monday harassed by a private grief. Early on the Sunday morning, before the newspapers were out, Malcolm had rung us up from Chequers to say that the R.101 had crashed. Lord Thomson had perished in the flaming wreckage, and Lord Thomson had for some while been the Prime Minister's close friend and confidant. Mr. MacDonald was still dazed by this blow. His hair had whitened during the night. He had been driven down from London at breakneck speed. Not that that was unusual. He loved speed, or rather, perhaps, danger. He was always flying, but what he liked best was to fly in really stormy weather. There was a day during the Election of 1931 when the weather was so bad that the Continental air traffic ceased, no R.A.F. machines were up, and over the length and breadth of England there was only one plane flying. In it was a solitary passenger, the Prime Minister. He liked driving fast too. And this time he had come down from London in four and three-quarter hours. His attendant police car arrived an hour and a half later.

The swelling tragedy of unemployment too rested heavily on his shoulders. He knew that what was bad would yet be worse. The state of the Unemployment Insurance Fund was already disturbing all who knew the facts. Here and there it

was even being used to supplement industrial incomes, employers and employed conniving to milk the fund. There had been deputations from the pits to suggest to the management a regular arrangement of three-day-a-week employment, by which the men would qualify permanently for unemployment insurance. Here and there disquieting symptoms of a new Speenhamland system disclosed themselves, but it was not easy to see how, acting alone, any one Party could arrest them. Sitting in the car on the way to golf at Spey Bay that August, Mr. MacDonald would smoke his cigar and read the morning paper and frown. Trouble in Lancashire, trouble in India, trouble in Palestine, trouble it almost seems everywhere. The car rattles on and Mr. MacDonald puffs his cigar and frowns attentively, with an occasional searching comment. In front, beside the driver, the impassive back of the official detective, beneath us the roads over which the Prime Minister once roamed as a penniless boy. Occasionally that summer, if only for a brief while, he had seemed dejected. With his private grief fresh upon him now, would he be able to deliver the heartening, the combative speech which the situation so obviously demanded? There need have been no misgivings. Not many men of action possess the sensitive temperament of an aesthete; but it is the peculiar strength of such as do, that, though their spirits may sink to darker moments than those of the more equable and thick-skinned, when the call comes they can rise to dominating heights. We sat for this occasion in the gallery at the back of the hall. The whole spectacle was spread before us.

The burly rows of trade unionists, the *Daily Herald* posters, the familiar faces at the front of the platform. Miss Susan Lawrence in the chair, as eagle-eyed for interruption as a schoolmistress with an unruly class. Nearer at hand, Sir Charles Trevelyan leant intently forward over the front row of the gallery and Lady Trevelyan stitched at his side. The Prime Minister spoke first. I had never heard him make a public speech before, save from the platform, close at hand. At the back of the great hall one realised for the first time the full quality of the speaker's voice. At times there was a deep organ note in it, which I have heard from no other public speaker. The speakers of the first quality to whom I have listened have mostly owed little to the range or timbre of their voices, but Mr. MacDonald, it almost seemed that day, would have been moving, even if he had spoken in an incomprehensible foreign tongue. Nor, I imagine, was this musical quality either conscious or deliberately manipulated. It had often been noticeable during the collective evening walks to the lighthouse at Lossiemouth that summer. The substance of the speech exactly matched the audience and the occasion. Its tone was grave yet defiant. It fiercely challenged both the doubters in the Party and the enemy outside it. It put heart into the loyal. When Mr. MacDonald sat down, opponents known to have privately pledged themselves against their chiefs were seen to be rising to their feet to cheer. I have heard critics complain that in this speech there was a strain of the theatrical. It seems to me that there must be a strain of the theatrical in all effective speaking. Like the actor,

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the speaker interprets an opinion, an emotion or a character to his audience. But since it should be his opinion, his emotion and his character which he communicates, there need be no insincerity in his art. And there has certainly been theatrical power in almost all our great Parliamentary figures, in Chatham, Fox, Disraeli and Gladstone. Bernard Shaw once congratulated MacDonald on his appearance in the first talking film of the Cabinet. "No Prime Minister," he said, "since that consummate actor Gladstone, would have done so well." In his speech at Llandudno at any rate the Prime Minister had done exactly what he had set out to do. No more can be expected of a speaker or of a speech.

Mosley spoke in the afternoon, on behalf of the celebrated Memorandum. As he marched resolutely to the rostrum, the applause was louder than that which had greeted any other speaker, save the Prime Minister himself. In the few minutes permitted he concisely outlined the unauthorised programme and flung several oblique challenges at the Ministers. There was no prospect, he admitted, of his proposals being adopted with Mr. Snowden at the Exchequer. Mr. Snowden meanwhile sat inscrutable upon the platform, occasionally passing his tongue, in a curiously lambent and snakelike flicker, over his lips. The motion was rejected, as of course. But Mosley had every reason for satisfaction. He had received formidable support. He was the first rebel within memory who had seriously threatened the executive machine. He had exhibited the challenging extent of his personal following. And the defeat of his motion absolved him from exposing the now

legendary Memorandum to critical dissection by the world at large. There appeared to be no doubt now that he was the heir apparent to the leadership. The only question which seemed to remain was, how soon would he succeed to it.

A few months later the great Slump had reached its nadir. Remorseless events were making it clear to me that I should have to leave the Party. The distressing process of coming to that decision only became more distressing if I thought of our friends in Gloucestershire, of the unemployed who had named children after me, of Mrs. Tippetts endlessly stitching, of Jack Wilkins, still confident that we should get there yet. I found it easier to think of Conferences. But easiest of all, of the intellectuals.

## X

### DEVASTATED AREA

By 1931 the nineteen twenties, that devastated area of the spirit, had slid bleakly past. But over that diminutive fraction of the nation among whom intellectual fashions come and go, the post-War infection still held sway. Not till 1931, a spiritual, as well as a political watershed, was its empire seriously shaken. My first contact with that bacillus, though I did not recognise it then, had come as far back as December, 1918. We were on ship between Alexandria and Marseilles, on our way back from Turkey. After four years of exile we knew next to nothing of what was afoot in Europe, save that the War was over and that we were on our way home. One of the Russian Grand Dukes paced the decks by the hour with the lady of some British Governor. We gathered that his exile was likely to be even longer than ours had been. It was characteristic that it should have been Woolley who introduced me to the new fashions. For Woolley (now more appropriately Sir Leonard) always did have inside information. Arriving in Kastamuni a few months later than the rest of us and from another front, he had entranced us with arresting information, not only as to the ancient Hittites but on the fortunes, prospects and higher strategy of the Great War. It came, I always supposed, of being an archæologist.

Sayce, T. E. Lawrence, Woolley, they were all like that—encyclopædic. It was fitting that it should have been Woolley who handed me *Eminent Victorians*, adding, "It's by a Cambridge Don, called Lytton Strachey. Everybody's reading it at home." I read it with mild amusement and, as far as I remember, with only the mental reservation that Dr. Arnold, the one character I then knew something about, had probably not, to judge from *Tom Brown*, been that sort of prig. I had no notion that I was shaking hands with the Post-War Era, the ghost, so to put it, of the naughty nineties sitting crowned upon the grave thereof. Later, when Post-War was all about us, when how many of the bloodless offspring of *Eminent Victorians* had recalled to me that encounter on the homing transport, I reread their prototype with greater curiosity. Like all its Post-War progeny it was an unmistakable orphan of the storm. During the War, the simple and non-intellectual, the Christian virtues, fortitude, discipline, reliability, unselfishness reigned supreme. Age-long butt of the intellectual, the strong, silent man holds the centre of the stage. The intellectual himself waits, impatient and contemptuous, in the wings. While the tornado lasted he cut a singularly unimpressive figure: it is no use being clever during an earthquake. Thus to frayed nerves was added wounded vanity. *Eminent Victorians* was the earliest symptom of the inevitable reaction. There had already, it is true, been Siegfried Sassoon; but though *Counter Attack* may have set the simple fashions of the later War-is-Hell school—the purple maior at the base and the bloodthirsty father in his

club—Sassoon was more than an intellectual; he was a first-class poet and a first-class fighting man. And it was early yet for the War-is-Hell books. Strachey's alternative was circuitous yet simple. You selected some man or woman of action, some Victorian antithesis of the intellectual, some embodiment of the war-time virtues, a General Gordon or a Florence Nightingale, and, in a phrase which has already begun significantly to date, you proceeded to debunk them. Your sitters represented just those types under whose temporary domination you had been fretting; they were men and women who had believed, who had dared and who had achieved. They had led lives of faith, discipline and action. Let them be debunked! Nor if, like Strachey, you knew your job, were you content with mere debunking. With what degree of subtlety you happened to command, you erected by implication beside the idol which you had dethroned the idol which you worshipped. In the last analysis, Strachey's various etchings are not so much portraits of his subjects, of Dr. Arnold, of General Gordon or Queen Victoria, as of Lytton Strachey. How amusing—thus ran your simple theme—that these full-blooded and active persons should have exaggerated the importance of Latin Grammar and moral earnestness, should have treated the Bible as an oracle or admired Landseer; how amusing indeed that in countless ways their morals, tastes and ambitions should have differed from those of a Bloomsbury intellectual of the twentieth century! It was not perhaps a formula which took you particularly near the heart of your subject, but for

this author's purpose it admirably sufficed. The literature of the titter had arrived. Thenceforth all who had acted, dared or believed, which is to say the great figures of almost every age, were to be neither heroes nor even villains, but only faintly amusing.

But it took some years after the tornado had passed for the ruck of the heroes of Post-War to emerge from their various vantage points into the full light of day and of publicity. I remember walking over soon after the war from my parents' house in Gloucestershire to have tea with John Drinkwater at Far Oakridge. "Siegfried Sassoon," he could then say, "is the only person I know who would really like to see a Red Revolution." But as Post-War conventions loomed larger, Sassoon would not be left long in this solitary pre-eminence. Indeed I should expect that he must have vacated the position as it began to become populous. He is not a person, I should say, who would tolerate inferior company. It pleased me much, when he visited us some years later, to see him, against the ranked shelves of the library, in riding breeches. I admire Sassoon's writings very greatly. He has written a book of poems and a couple of prose works of the first quality. But he is a poet who has also been both a soldier and a hunting man, and it occurs to me that my taste for his writings is probably sharpened by my lifelong weakness for those who have lived in more worlds than one. . . . It was some years after the tornado had passed before the ruck of the heroes of Post-War emerged from their various vantage-points. Nor were the innumerable cultivators, after

Lytton Strachey, of the literary titter, among the first. The earliest perhaps, certainly the earliest I encountered in person, were the apostles of nonsense. I was in Paris in 1920 with a friend who, being a Scotch Platonist, was professionally interested in intellectual aberration as such. Paris in 1920 offered him a prolific field of study. We began with a Dadaist reception, at which a sprightly young exponent in a stiff collar and a business suit explained to me the simple but far-reaching basis of the cult. All that matters, you figure, but *all* that matters (he said) is that the artist should do as he pleases. In art there is no good, nor is there any bad. There is only the artist who pleases himself. Thus! And, producing a leaflet, he exhibited one of the masterpieces of his school. It consisted of a splodge of ink, shaken out at random from a fountain pen. Hold! he exclaimed proudly. This picture calls itself The Virgin Mary. It is as good, Monsieur understands, as a portrait of the Virgin by Raphael. That is to say, it is neither better nor worse. Since both artists have done that which pleased them, their works, Monsieur understands, are of equal merit. "Ye-es," I agreed, a trifle doubtfully. "The only difference seems to be—don't you think perhaps that your friend was rather *easily* pleased?" My instructor shrugged his shoulders, with a tolerant smile. "In effect that is as Monsieur pleases." I was glad that I too might please myself. It seemed in fact that this was a movement with which a good many people ought to be able to please themselves. It looked, for one thing, as if it ought not to be very difficult to achieve artistic prominence. To reach equality with Raphael at a bound,

with your first work, with a shake of the pen-nib; that surely was something. I glanced down at the leaflet which my instructor had handed me. This, he explained, was a periodical but, in accordance with the principles of Dada, it was not a regular periodical. Sometimes two numbers would appear on successive days; sometimes there would be none for six months. There were other contributions besides the splodge of ink. A photograph of a young man with a moustache grinning at you through a tennis-racket. A poem composed exclusively of several lines of numerals, printed upside down. On what principle, I wondered, did the editor select? How did one artist achieve greater prominence than another? But before I could frame this rather delicate question in French which should be at once tactful and grammatical, my interlocutor had been swallowed by the throng—it was a small and very stuffy room and there were a great many Dadaistes—and I found myself talking to a mildly amused young Englishwoman. “You should go to one of their Conferences,” she said. “While somebody is making a speech, you know, one of them will come on and blast on a foghorn for a couple of minutes. Or somebody lets off half a dozen shots from a revolver in the wings.” “I see,” I said. “Just to liven things up, I suppose?” “I suppose so,” said the young Englishwoman with a yawn. “Do you regard Dadaisme as a very important movement?” I asked with some curiosity. “Oh, I suppose so,” she said. “There are articles on it in all the French papers. And they get quite big crowds at their shows. It’s a change, anyhow, isn’t

it? And, of course," she added, "it's so international." "You mean they do this sort of thing in Berlin too?" "Yes, that of course. But I was thinking of the name. Dada; it means something different in every language, you know." "Yes," put in my original Dadaiste, who was just then thrust towards us by some current in the press. "Dada, you see, in all languages, is the first sound a child can utter." "But if this sort of thing interests you," said the young Englishwoman, as the Dadaiste was borne once more out of earshot, "the person you ought to meet is Gertrude Stein."

My friend naturally insisted upon calling on Miss Stein. He was a Scot and a philosopher and by now he was enjoying himself very much indeed. We presented ourselves, with an introduction, at Miss Stein's studio, in the guise of two seekers after truth, from Oxford. It was a strictly accurate description. Miss Stein was good enough to show us a number of her works. Naturally she did not explain them. All artists, I told myself as I read the first, consider that their writings explain themselves. My friend read the typewritten sheets and handed them gravely on to me. In such comment as it seemed proper to offer I thought it right that a Scotsman and a philosopher should sustain the chief part. He was utterly reliable. I only once heard him unkind during the whole of that Paris visit. Raymond Duncan was lunching with us, in the homespun tunic and sandals of an ancient Greek. Raymond Duncan's belief was that the world is not simple enough. One should make one's own clothes, cook one's own food—like the ancient

Greeks. Everything one should do for oneself and all would then be well. This had been the secret, he said, of the Greeks. "But surely," said my friend, "the Greeks despised all manual labour. They called it banausic, fit only for slaves." That, I thought, is almost cruel of him. There are moments, however, I suppose, when even a Scottish Platonist can hardly be expected to restrain himself.

The literary protagonist of Dadaism on the grand scale is, of course, Mr. James Joyce. Dadaism itself, so shortlived are often the most triumphant artistic innovations, is now scarcely a memory, but Mr. Joyce is still a celebrated modern writer. It was in Paris and at this time that the Augean task of preparing Mr. Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*, for publication was being undertaken. There were legal difficulties, one gathered, in England and the United States, and an American bookshop in Paris had gallantly stepped in to save a great work for posterity. Literary circles were agog with the adventure. The difficulties, it appeared, were enormous. One and all, the ordinary typewriting establishments returned the manuscript untyped. The young ladies whom they employed, unfamiliar no doubt with Post-War literature, were apt, after reading a page or two, to burst into tears and consider themselves insulted. Eventually it had been necessary to distribute the precious manuscript in separate bundles to enthusiastic amateur volunteers. Even so, I was told, there had been disasters. One volunteer had been the wife of a diplomat and by a mischance the diplomat himself had lighted upon the script and had even read it. Fortunately,

said my informant, this lady had been entrusted with one of the least unconventional of the consignments. In spite of which, the diplomat had burned every sheet of it and assured his wife that if she brought another line of the book into his house he would leave it. With which my informant invited me cordially to subscribe for a copy before publication. This was one of a number of occasions, I am afraid, on which I have failed to recognise a profitable investment. For I need not add that, long before the end of the nineteen twenties, the admiration of many scores of readers in two continents, and the extreme rarity of the volume itself, had increased its market value to many times the not inconsiderable price of publication. Within a year or two, the coteries were resounding with the praises of *Ulysses*. Few, it sometimes struck me, who admired had read it, and none explained what compelled their admiration. After a year or two, I read the book, or most of it, myself. In some ways, I thought, it is surprising that it should have been banned. Those responsible, it almost seemed, might have argued that no community, had *Ulysses* only not been confined to the coteries, would have tolerated the combination of so much grubbiness with so much pretension. Countless schoolboy puns, that all-pervasive, that oh! so knowing schoolboy leer, and wads of the realist's dreariest catalogue style—exposed to the public, one could just imagine it exciting Dublin, but exciting London or New York? That surely one could not imagine. And yet so roundly did the pundits, never unfolding their reasons, acclaim it as a revolutionary work of

genius that I was almost humble enough to give it the benefit of the doubt—until I came upon the same author's later *Two Tales of Shem and Shaun*. "Adrian stuccestill phiz-a-phiz to the gripes in an accessit of aurignacian." This was the most intelligible sentence in all the forty-five pages, and I could not make head or tail of it. Nobody, I decided, should persuade me to give *Shem and Shaun* the benefit of the doubt. If serious critics of modern literature took it seriously, so much the worse for modern literature. In the fairy tale, you recollect, everybody goes on saying that the Emperor has clothes on because everybody else says that all clever people can see that he has clothes on. "The whool of the whaal in the wheel of the whorl of the Boubou from Bourneum has thus come to taon." For myself I hereby assert that the Emperor has on no clothes whatever.

All the various cults of Post-War were deeply tinged with paganism. The drab tides of Victorian rationalism had turned and were already on the ebb before 1914. But the War set ugly new cross-currents flowing. From most of those who fought, suffered or dared in the national cause, war had exacted all they could muster of the traditional Christian virtues, unselfishness, fortitude and faith. And many of those who, physically or spiritually, had stood aside, could trace no small part of their sense of exclusion or mortification to this spectacle. And when the War was over, it was against the simpler virtues, now no longer in demand, that the venom of the revolt of the intellectuals was chiefly

directed. But war had certainly neither popularised rationalism nor discredited traditional standards with the bulk of the fighting men and their women-folk—you do not find the Post-War cults popular in British Legion branches—and hence derived a major source of the gulf which was now steadily to widen between the intellectuals and the nation. Beneath the light-hearted charlatanry of the cult of Dada and its heterogeneous kindred in literature and art, it had not been difficult to detect from the first a solid vein of mere heathenry. But it was after the close of the 'twenties, with Post-War already in its death agonies, that I most vividly encountered the nadir and embodiment of all that Dada stood for. We had gone to inspect a great collection of modern art. It had been accumulated over a good many years by a wealthy and distinguished north-countryman, then recently deceased. He had held high public station, he had been well known and respected in University, as well as Government and business circles. He had been a man of wide culture. He had been a pillar of the local church. Above all, he had been in the fullest sense, progressive. He could resist everything but novelty. For him the latest was always and inevitably the best. As we approached the austere, the exquisitely proportioned façade of the grey Georgian mansion in which the Collection had been housed, I noticed with some apprehension a female figure in bronze in the centre of a semi-circle of laurels on the lawn before the portico. The woman had two knees, it may have been three, on one leg. "Remember," said my companion warningly, "this is going to be *modern Art*." I nodded

comprehendingly. I would be humble, I resolved; I would suspend judgment. This was Modern Art. Wherever necessary I would give the benefit of the doubt. But in the hall my critical faculty, I regret to say, was already rebelliously awake. It was not the pictures, for there were no pictures yet; only a negroid head in bronze at the turn of the great staircase. But that rug, that chest, that chandelier—whoever was responsible for them may have possessed many sterling qualities, but not, surely, that of artistic perception. Dutifully, however, I stifled my doubts and we commenced the grand tour. Pictures were everywhere. To the highest attic they lined the walls of every room; they were on the landings, down the passages, in the bathrooms. They were piled in dozens and scores on chairs and sofas and against tables. I counted upwards of two hundred beneath a billiard table. For years this munificent patron must have been buying whatever was most up-to-date. In tens, in scores, in hundreds the latest movements had yielded their flower to him, only to be outmoded within a few months by what was later still. Beneath that billiard table alone lay what mountains of aspiration towards novelty, once honoured no doubt, however transiently, by a place upon the walls, soon relegated, as art moved inexorably on, to these obscure and dusty recesses. Here and there we came upon something deft and lovely, a drawing by Augustus John, a water-colour by John Nash. More often, however, our guide would ease admiringly from some stack a canvas which looked as if the contents of a paint-box had been spilled over it at

random, or a drawing in which were framed only a few such angular pencillings as a schoolboy, one would have supposed, might doodle during a geometry lesson. But still I remained resolutely uncritical. These, after all, were the works of accepted artists. They were not, there could be no denying that, my cup of tea; but equally obviously they must be other people's. Not many other peoples', I could not help reflecting. There could never surely have been an age in which Art had been so completely unintelligible to so many. And mentally I pictured Mrs. Tippetts, Jack Wilkins, my confectioner from Kingswood examining the geometrical doodling of these Abstract paintings. But then to be caviare to the general, to practise an esoteric chatter from studio to studio, was, after all, one understood, the chief object of most genuinely modern artists and poets. Profoundly academic in the practice of their profession, it was not surprising that in politics, though so often of the Left, they should so seldom look kindly upon democracy. From a side door of the grey Georgian mansion we stepped out upon the lawn. I still retained, I flattered myself, an open mind. There were doubtless excellent reasons, I was still prepared to admit, why those who liked this sort of thing found this the sort of thing they liked. At that moment, however, we found ourselves, without any warning, face to face with two pieces of sculpture. As we stared silently at these objects, it was borne in upon me that between the pictures and the sculpture we had crossed a spiritual frontier. However right it might have been to suspend judgment, to remain

obstinately humble, before the most esoteric of the pictures, all the centuries of Christendom cried out that one should become militantly critical now. The first of these works consisted of a smooth lump of brown stone, shapeless, save that it wore, if viewed squarely from the front, some remote, some dropsical likeness to the bulge of a lady's handbag. In the centre of the summit of the smooth unshaped mass were two tiny protrusions, like the ears of a hare. One of my companions afterwards maintained that our guide had asserted that this was a representation of two men in a boat. My own belief is that on the contrary he had said merely that such was his own jocular name for it. And this was certainly borne out by what he had to tell us of the neighbouring group. Here were two uncouth masses of brown stone, each of which, bulging and unshaped, yet dimly suggested a flagon—such a flagon, lacking incidentally all neck, as an idiot child might have paddled together by chance in its first blind pawings with clay. At the extreme left-hand corner of one of the neckless flagons was something which resembled a fragment of the breast of a man, or ape. In the centre of the other was a rough slot. Otherwise the masses were wholly undiversified, save that on each were a few shallow, and apparently fortuitous, angular incisions. Our guide now unmistakably said that he had never heard a name attached to this production, but that to him it had sometimes occurred that it might perhaps represent two human forms. And he added that its sculptor had happened to visit the collection lately and, when asked the meaning of the angular

surface scratches, had replied that he had certainly known when he cut them but could not now remember. I found myself regretting more than ever that this munificent patron of modern art was dead. A lifelong devotion to novelty had here carried him back at last, beyond Christendom, beyond the pagan civilisations, beyond the iron, the bronze and the stone ages, beyond the first cave-scratchings of reindeer-men, to something so primitive that it was scarcely human, something which might have been fashioned by an unusually intelligent gorilla. It was fascinating to speculate, had he lived, at what point in the unimaginable depths of the past this Maecenas of Progress might have arrived.

Through that expensive and characteristic Collection there ran no doubt an unmistakable streak of heathenry—the Satanism which worships ugliness as the material embodiment of evil; there was the charlatanry, too, of the fabled Emperor's clothes, and the despairing aversion of the new intellectual from the world of common men. But more obviously than any of these post-War traits one could not help noticing the cult of Motion. At all costs let us be Progressive. In politics Progress is canalised. In politics it is usually only a question of producing, as in geometry, the line AB. You have advanced in the direction AB. Progress is therefore to continue to advance in the direction AB. One knows what Progress is, *ex hypothesi*; one does not, one cannot, revise one's hypotheses. And the illusion to which the Progressive is liable in politics, a minor illusion yet an illusion which was responsible for the

formidable events of 1931, is merely the illusion that you can produce the line AB *ad infinitum*, the illusion, so to put it, that there lies no spiritual frontier somewhere between those pictures and that sculpture. Income tax is at four and six? Then income tax at five shillings is Progress. I demand it and am a Progressive. But soon alas! my neighbour bids five and six. He has placed himself upon my Left; he is more Progressive than I, and *ipso facto* more up-to-date, more intelligent and more moral. In a competitive age one must keep up with the Browns. The temptation to go six shillings (or, for that matter, to slip the nationalisation of two more industries into my programme) becomes irresistible. Leave the comparatively restricted field of politics however, and you find Progress no longer channelled. Mere movement, in any, or indeed in all, directions will often suffice. A body known as the Federation of Progressive Persons and Societies is in some ways one of the most characteristic organisations of our time. It should also be, one would have expected, one of the most formidable, the very cumulation and embodiment of the spirit of the age. And if it has not yet shaken the foundations of society it may be that this is because loyalty, one understands, to any movement "commonly accepted as Progressive," will qualify for adhesion. And there are so many, and they are so different. The devotee of vaccination, and of non-vaccination, of vivisection and of anti-vivisection, the nudist and the apostle of Rational Dress, those who believe in eating their meat raw and those who believe in eating no meat whatever, those who want armaments to fight Fascists with,

those who wish to fight Fascists but without armaments, and those who refuse to fight anybody with anything—all presumably are welcome, for all are undoubtedly Progressive. Such a body in conclave should generate heat as well as light. Yet, though it may progress simultaneously towards every point of the compass, the bond which holds it together is doubtless sufficient; it Progresses.

We are all Progressives, but it is well to remember that somewhere between those pictures and that sculpture there lies a Rubicon, and that even the worthy and eminent are sometimes as liable as my Maecenas of Modernism to cross it unawares. I remember asking the clerical Head of a House why he had appointed a distinguished theoretical atheist and amoralist to a post of special responsibility for the conduct of the young men in his College. He replied, with some slight traces of embarrassment, that the gentleman in question possessed great intellectual ability, that nowadays many people held lax views on morals and religion and that one must, when all was said and done, move with the times. I wondered whether or not it had sometimes occurred to that amiable cleric that in this particular direction we move with the times partly because so many of those who, like himself, might be expected in this respect at least not to move with them, consider it prudent to do so. Had he too perhaps failed to distinguish between the pictures and the sculpture? This I could hardly inquire, but it is always tempting to explore the mind of a specialist, and I told him how a public school boy I knew had recently been prepared for confirmation by a young housemaster,

who chanced to be an eager and proselytising Communist. Did he consider that one who was himself pledged to dogmatic atheism would find it easy to give valuable instruction in the doctrines of Christianity? Not easy, he replied, No, not easy; but doubtless in appointing him the Headmaster of of the school concerned had been unaware of his colleague's beliefs. "Would you then advise a University Tutor," I asked, "when writing a testimonial for a Communist pupil who wishes to become a schoolmaster, always to disclose, if he happens to be aware of it, that the young man he is recommending is a Communist?" I did not add "or a Fascist," for there were at that time no University Fascists, Fascism in the Universities, as elsewhere, having arrived as a subsequent riposte to Communism. My neighbour reared sharply back, like an elderly horse which perceives a serpent in its path. "Certainly not," he said. "A man's beliefs are his own private property." We seemed here to have reached a *cul de sac* and I was beginning to do my best to piece together the probable aggregate result of the application to society of these various expert pronouncements, when another neighbour—we were sitting at dessert—leaned across and said with some emotion, "If one tells them when a man is a Communist one ought just as much to tell them when he is a Conservative." The speaker was a Radical Non-Conformist; Conservatism, I knew, or, to be more accurate, Conservatives, would be far more alien to him than Communism. How well by now I knew the type! Did I not remember the fawning, prophetic articles in British Liberal journals

which explained, long before the civil war, how Largo Caballero would Sovietise Spain? And my poor Liberal friend who, before he was killed in Spain, was writing a book to explain that the Liberal and the Communist creeds were in fact identical? Was not the contempt and suspicion for all Conservatives among the crusted, God-fearing old Radicals of Gloucestershire deeper than mere intellectual conviction—a deep-seated social and hereditary instinct, with its roots in the days of the Georgian squire, perhaps of the Cavalier? “I quite see,” I said politely. “On the other hand there is a difference, don’t you think, between the two cases. A Conservative of course has his own shortcomings, but they usually aren’t such aggressive ones, are they? He isn’t pledged to atheism or to the violent subversion of society. Especially he isn’t pledged to proselytism.” “One oughtn’t to mention a man’s political views,” repeated the non-conformist with decision, “any more than one ought to disclose whether he belongs to the Church of England or not, unless one is specially asked. When I was a boy,” he added with sudden fire, if with a certain degree of irrelevance, “I often heard my father say that he would as soon go into a public house as into an Established Church.” The conversation veered elsewhere, and while my neighbour discussed his College politics with the Senior Tutor, I had leisure once again to reflect that the assailants of traditional morality are so diminutive a minority that the up to date clerics who dutifully give ground to them may almost be said to be abandoning the mass of their fellow-countrymen in the trenches.

Mr. Aldous Huxley's novels were appearing at regular intervals during these years. To compare the population of these fascinating works with one's own neighbours and relations was odd enough; to compare them with my friends, the wage-earners of Gloucestershire, was positively uncanny. For here, faithfully preserved in the hard dry light of Mr. Huxley's genius, was the intelligentsia of the nineteen-twenties. It was a world which bore almost no relation whatever to humanity at large. Entering it, one found oneself fumbling to acquire the conventions of an unknown country, on whose threshold all the standards of the world one lived in must be deliberately laid aside. As Tolstoy said of philosophy, once you had accepted its assumptions this pictured world made sense—until you tried to fit the picture to the world of reality. The real world contains of course the pervert, the promiscuous and the pessimist. Only it does not contain anything like so many. Mr. Huxley himself however was clearly under no illusions. He was not painting England, he was painting Bloomsbury. It is possible, of course, that posterity will misunderstand him; after all, thanks to a small literary clique, we still think of the Restoration as an age of dissolute cynicism, though the squire, the burgess and the labourer were, in fact, no more rakes under Charles the Second than their counterparts in the nineteen-twenties were cynical and pessimistic hedonists. But there are plenty of others who, unlike Mr. Huxley, have genuinely mistaken Bloomsbury for England. Usually they have been observers who, outside the books and the coteries, lacked all contact

with the English. A recent critical work indeed attributes the grand discovery, of the decadence of British society, to three writers in chief, to the American Henry James, and to Eliot and Joyce, an American and an Irishman.

Striking indeed were the contrasts between the world in which during these years I chiefly moved, and the spiritual Bloomsbury which stamped itself so indelibly on the post-War era. The most obvious perhaps was the ubiquitous nervous tension, the unfailing pessimism of the intellectuals. Faced with the appalling problems of reconstruction, they usually found an all-embracing defeatism the line of least resistance. Reconstruction was at once too arduous and too dull. While unreflecting citizens were busy with the immediate task, rebuilding a business, organising a Women's Institute or a local branch of the Labour Party, the intellectuals were mostly content to prophesy disaster, whether in the comprehensive form of what was almost gloatingly described as "the end of European civilisation" or in the familiar variant of some political Utopia to be reached by way of catastrophic revolution. The war, they concluded, had perhaps indeed in many cases been tempted to conclude, since they had borne no part in it, had "settled nothing." And if the most gigantic effort in history had ended in mere tragic futility, what hope was there in any other effort, unless indeed the effort, its objects and those who undertook it should be the antithesis of the war, the fighting men and the fighting-men's ideals? The unconscious and unspoken case against the war may have been that it divided so many of the intellectuals

from the nation. But the conscious and avowed case was simple. At the cost of unparalleled suffering the war had failed to produce a new and a better Europe; and it had failed to produce a new and a better England. Sometimes as I drove home through the dark from the annual dinner of some British Legion Branch, whose members had seemed neither to despair of the future nor to be ashamed of the past, I would meditate upon the curious myopia of the hyper-intelligent. I could not remember ever myself supposing that the war was being fought to create a new Jerusalem. To my friends and myself it had always, I thought, been perfectly clear that it was being fought to prevent Prussian militarism and materialism from dominating Europe. And this tremendous object it had very palpably achieved. We had fought not for a new Jerusalem but for England. What was saved in the war was not an ideal, a Utopian England, not an England cleansed of all folly, poverty and crime, not an England in which all tears were wiped away for ever, but England. What the war had decided was that the English way of life should not be permanently extinguished, the world over, by the barbaric military oligarchy of Berlin. For this my friends had died, and it still seemed to me that the cause had been worthy of them. And as the white tree-stems slid into my headlights, I would wonder drowsily how any one, how even an intellectual in the nineteen twenties, could ever have supposed that such a war would make the world *better*. What the war had been fought for was to prevent the world from becoming incalculably worse. I am attacked

by a highwayman and emerge from the dust-up with a bleeding head, a broken arm and several bruises, but with the highwayman disarmed and in flight. I shall not thank you for jeering at me because my injuries have not miraculously transformed me into a combination of Hercules and St. Francis. I shall still no doubt be the same weak-willed and selfish individual, the same weak-willed and selfish individual indeed plus a selection of not very rapidly healing injuries. But I shall have survived. That is all, but it is enough. It is curious that the same men who habitually derided the victory of 1918 as not worth the winning, although it saved Europe from a military dictatorship which had itself provoked the war, are now so urgent that we should ourselves provoke a conflict in order to save Europe from a military dictatorship. As the long beech-clad stretches between Tetbury and Cirencester streamed by—after Cirencester I should be too tired to think—I decided that I shared none of the fashionable disillusionment about the war. I had come near to sharing it though. I had of course read C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment*, the spiritual progenitor of countless hundred-thousand-word cries of despair of much meaner literary pretensions. It had impressed me very much indeed. I read it again, and it impressed me just a trifle less. It made out, perhaps, one felt now, almost too convincing a case. Moreover here and there, now that I paused to test it, it scarcely answered to my own experience. *Were* most of the sons of the aristocratic and influential, for example, in cushy staff jobs? And it was the same, by the way, with *Rough Justice*, that spirited

repetition of the same theme in the form of fiction. At the first reading, for example, I accepted the cruel portrait of Warren, the President of Magdalen, as a mere snob careerist fawning on the titled, utterly indifferent to all plebian merit. I knew of course that Warren had made Magdalen, which was at least something, and certainly he had frequently gone out of his way to be kind to me, an undistinguished member of another College. All the same, I let the portrait pass. This was perhaps after all, to a gifted observer, the essence of the man. But before I read the book again, I had met a man who had been a Junior Research Fellow of Magdalen at the end of Warren's reign. And he had said that personally he accepted Warren as soon as he realised that, though Warren obviously enjoyed the company of the great, he would expend infinite pains and courtesy on the humble too. "I for example," said my informant, "was nobody. But when I was in Rome doing some research after I got my Magdalen Fellowship, the old President wrote to me every month with the latest Magdalen news. No one else in the College, I may say, did that. And I once met a man" (he said) "who had got a scholarship at Magdalen early in the war. He never came into residence; after the Armistice he went straight into some job or other. But several years after the war was over he got engaged to be married. He was an entirely obscure person but somehow the President saw the notice of his engagement and remembered who he was. And the old man wrote him a charming letter, to say that, though he had never come up to Oxford, he, the President, always thought of him as

a Magdalen man and hoped he would think of himself as such. And perhaps therefore this man would forgive him if he sent him a line of congratulation and good wishes." It really didn't fit in with Montague's picture at all. Nor did I find it any easier to suit most of the War-is-Hell books to my own experience, or to such of my friends' experiences as they had divulged to me. The fact is, they were mostly written by men who had too little in common with ordinary folk. They bore the familiar trade-mark of post-War. To be honest, I decided, I could believe wholly neither in the War-is-Hell outcry, nor in its main corollary. War is certainly hell, I agreed, but it is also certainly not all hell. How could one forget, after all, that in the war years, perhaps for the first time in our history, the name of the profiteer had been mud and the only aristocracy had been an artisocracy of service? And if the main thesis needed searching qualification, its chief corollary, that all war is everywhere and always evil, seemed to me, as a historian, a palpable absurdity. To be dreaded above all things, yes: but everywhere and always evil? As for that, ask an American whether he would expunge his Civil War from History. He may hedge by telling you that he would have preferred the suppression of slavery without the Civil War, but, pinned to the choice of Civil War or continued slavery, you will find that he chooses the war. And the Italian wars of liberation? Over them and Garibaldi what tears of admiration were there not, are there not still, shed by British Liberals? The League of Nations was the architect of its own chief failures when, setting out

to suppress armed insurrection against any provocation anywhere, it neglected to substitute for Garibaldi some bloodless but effective instrument of change.

By 1931 many intellectuals were not only convinced that, if it did not, like them, embrace Utopia and revolution, ordinary humanity was doomed; they were actually convinced that catastrophe had already begun. The decadence detected by the observant American-Irish eyes of Mr. Henry James, Mr. Eliot and Mr. Joyce in English morals had become apparent, to many intellectuals, in English economic life as well. Nor was it any longer a mere question of prophecy—as when a young Oxford graduate, a Socialist ex-President of the Union, who had just taken his First in Modern Greats, assured me in 1931 that within six months there would be four million unemployed. The convention of despair had now begun to blind men even to the palpable realities of the present. It was another young Oxford graduate, also a Socialist ex-President of the Union and a First, who wrote to me dolefully that for the last fifty years the rich had been growing steadily richer and the poor poorer. He had not of course lived through the fabulous transformation of the underpaid, hat-touching wage-earners of my boyhood, wholly unaided by the State in unemployment, sickness and old age, with their class-uniforms of coarse, ill-fitting Sunday black, into the independent young artisan in week-end plus fours. It is more than possible indeed that he had never entered a wage-earner's home. Nevertheless there are statistics of the social insurances, of wages, housing and

health, and even of income tax. And he had got a First at Oxford. My young acquaintance, however, had been trained from Sixth Form days onwards to comprehensive absorption of ideas, and once it has become fashionable among the coteries, an idea can survive for decades unscathed by contact with reality. Are there not even those who believe that Russian workmen are well-housed and well paid?

Miners, alas, rarely read the heart-rending novels in which young Communist intellectuals, who have spent a fortnight collecting local colour in a mining area, describe the hideousness, the misery and the smouldering wrath beneath it all. But when they do they are more irritated than amused. The books in a sense are genuine. Fresh from strolling about Oxford or Cambridge in suede shoes, the author has probably never previously spoken to a working-man, who was not a political agitator, in his life. Naturally it is not difficult for him to find what he hopes and expects to find. Rarely indeed is the life of the mining village painted, as in Mr. Tomlinson's *Coal-Miner*, in cheerful hue. Mr. Tomlinson's picture is one which no professional misery-monger would even recognise. But then Mr. Tomlinson was a miner himself.

One of the most characteristic features of the nineteen-twenties was the new absorption of the intellectuals in politics. Hopelessly out of contact with the mass of the people, they were almost uniquely disqualified from understanding democratic politics; never before in history, however, has such a chorus of amateur experts given tongue. No author of the multitudinous novels which

described, and circulated among, the intellectual coteries, but was prepared, in his spare time, to put the Foreign Secretary right. The very scholarship examinations at the Universities teemed with opportunities for exposing the errors of the British Government. And, thanks to the History Master, these questions at least the dullest schoolboy could answer. Thousands of intelligent persons who had never crossed a working-man's threshold, or gone short of a meal themselves, knew all about the starvation of the unemployed in 1932 on unemployment insurance slightly more generous than that which most of them had applauded when it was dispensed by a Labour Government in 1924. Thousands of intelligent persons lay awake at night because the British Government was not more truculent with Japan or Italy. And if you pointed out to them that no Government nowadays can browbeat a powerful state unless in the last resort its own people is prepared, and known to be prepared, to go to war, and if you then asked whether they had any evidence that the British people had in fact been prepared to see their sons killed for either Manchukuo or Abyssinia, the most inveterate War-is-Hell man, after a resentful stare, would reply, "Perhaps not. But the Government could easily have whipped up a war fever."

How is it that the feeble and exotic creeds upon which so much ink has been spilled have left nine citizens out of ten, perhaps ninety-nine out of a hundred, so completely unscathed? Because, in the first place, the public of literature and art, unlike the public of the wireless, is extremely small. In the

whole course of its existence the most spectacular best-seller probably does not touch a tithe of the intelligences to be reached by one casual talk over the microphone. The British Legion Branch was no more aware of the cries of despair which resounded in the columns of the highbrow weeklies than was the trade union branch of the economic theories of Socialist Professors. And because, in the second place, the inhibitions of formal ideology have scarcely yet invaded British journalism. Thus during these years on the leader page of the *Observer* Mr. Garvin was regularly denouncing the Comintern as the only begetter of Fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain, as the one permanent obstacle to world peace. Meanwhile the firm of Gollancz was publishing a flood of political novels, most of whose authors, though usually quite destitute of political experience, preached precisely that nebulous and neurotic "Leftism" which Mr. Garvin and the *Observer* so eloquently resented. And the chief reviewer of fiction for the *Observer* was the late Gerald Gould. And the late Gerald Gould was not only an enthusiastic Socialist but official Reader for the publishing firm of Gollancz. This saving British tolerance, or muddle-headedness, is not of course universal. The critical weeklies of the Left are as logical as their European *confrères*, and the *New Statesman*, as far as I know, has never invited Dean Inge to join its staff. The *Daily Herald*, however, with its munificent prize competitions and its sportive photographs of Capitalists at play, is only slightly more consistent than the Conservative Press. There will be no civil war in England until we are unlucky enough to

learn logic. Meanwhile there is this disadvantage about the ubiquitous red reviewer; that any writer who conducts himself disrespectfully towards the conventions of the subversive is likely to be ignored or slanged even in journals whose professed object is to uphold church and state. Embedded in these blameless columns the derogatory verdicts suffice; the disrespectful are blanketed, the potentially disrespectful are frightened and the immense public which is tired and bewildered by the conventions of the nineteen twenties continues to be deprived of the mental fare for which it is more than ready.

## XI

### CRASH

PROLONGED indecision dries the very marrow in the bones. It leaves a man limp and leaden. I am thankful that when the crash came, and in the summer of 1931 a whole era clattered in ruins about our ears, I did not hesitate for longer than—well, weeks though it seemed, it cannot have been so very many days. Not days however only, but grim and sleepless nights. In spite of which, I was the first Labour Candidate or Member, after Malcolm MacDonald himself, to follow the Prime Minister into the new and still fabulous National alliance. We were staying that summer at Crowthorne, and I can still see myself pulling up opposite Camberley Post Office, with my declaration of allegiance in my pocket, and I can still hear the thud, so symbolic, so final, with which it dropped into the pillar box. That, I thought, is the end of politics for me. My wife and Malcolm were watching me with ironic sympathy from the car. It was characteristic of Mr. MacDonald that his answer, when it came, was almost regretful. He was still thinking of National Government as a temporary expedient of crisis. He had gone out of his way to advise the younger Labour Ministers not to follow him. Why should he destroy the Labour Party, he who, more than any one, had built it? Two months later, when the news

of its electoral massacre was coming in over the wireless, he broke down and wept. My hesitations, I am afraid, such as they were, had been largely personal. The political issue was reasonably clear. I had never had any liking for Dole Socialism with its endless ascent of bigger and better doles, that vision of a democracy gone soft which I had heard the Prime Minister denouncing among the sand dunes of Lossiemouth a full twelve months ago. Whatever structure was to be erected in the future, it could not be upon the quicksands of economic chaos. And as for the British people, I thought I knew my own cross-section of them well enough to be fairly sure that, to leaders who had the courage to call on them for sacrifice, they would resoundingly respond. It was on the very day on which my decision, long ruminated, eventually became irrevocable, that we drove across to lunch with Lord Passfield and Mrs. Sidney Webb. Perhaps indeed it was that distinctly difficult afternoon which revealed to me with painful but final lucidity where I did, and where I certainly did not, stand. The famous couple had invited us before the storm had burst. I had not met them before, and it would in any event have been a memorable experience. Under the actual circumstances it was more than memorable; it was terrifying. Seldom, if ever, I hope, can I have made so unfavourable an impression upon such kindly hosts. To the conversation of my hostess, so widely-informed and so decisive, it required the full concentration of an undisturbed intelligence to do justice. Alas! under the circumstances an undistracted intelligence was precisely what it was

impossible for me to present. And the topics to which the conversation constantly reverted were so delicate. For Mrs. Webb naturally disapproved profoundly of the Prime Minister. Lord Passfield's disapproval, I fancied, was slightly tempered by satisfaction at his release, with the fall of the Government, from the Colonial Office, of which his experience had been far from fortunate. He was soon to publish the article in which he maintained that at least as early as June the Prime Minister had been plotting a National Government of which he was to be the head, and that in this intrigue his principal motive was a liking for what Lord Passfield described as "the aristocratic embrace." As to which let me note in passing that it is probably true that certain detached spectators of the political scene pressed the claims of a National Government on Mr. MacDonald in June: Mr. MacDonald however replied that the scheme was an impossible one. And when the crisis opened, those who were most closely in touch with him knew best how unremittingly he struggled, and what risks he was prepared to run, to keep the Labour Government in being, and how he was expecting, if it fell, to return to Lossiemouth and virtual retirement. While as for the notorious embrace of aristocracy, Mr. MacDonald, it is true, had none of those complexes of inferiority which make some men resentfully arrogant towards the rich and powerful. A great gentleman, he was naturally and immediately at home in the fisherman's cottage or the duke's saloon. He preferred, no doubt, the fisherman's cottage, but he had none of the inhibitions of that queer, inverted snobbery of

so many of the ultra-democratic. I did not, I am bound to confess, controvert our hostess's strictures. Or, if I did, it was so lamely that I imagine Mrs. Webb was hardly aware that I had spoken. I told myself, no doubt, that it would not be polite to contradict my hostess; but the truth was, I am afraid, that, dejected as I was, I simply had not the spirit for an argument with so formidable an antagonist. And so when, with an effect of playing the ace of trumps, Mrs. Webb exclaimed, "And what's more, MacDonald is an æsthete," though I reflected confusedly that this, oddly enough, was just what attracted me about him, I maintained a craven silence. But worse was to come. "I always say," said Mrs. Webb, "that the real test of whether you are a Socialist or not is, Do you want the Russian Five Year Plan to succeed? If you don't want the Russian Five Year Plan to succeed you are not a Socialist." Surely, I thought, as I murmured some polite and non-committal comment, my prospective apostasy is detected. But for the first time since lunch had started, I had begun furiously to think. There were few things, I realised, which I desired or, for that matter, expected, less than the success of the Russian Five Year Plan. And I thought of my hostess's exacting shibboleth against the background of my working-class friends, for the vast majority of whom politics were as Christian as John Bunyan and as English as a Cotswold village. "For Comintern, Dniepostroi and anti-God"—I tried to picture Lord Passfield and Mrs. Webb rallying the Commons of England to that cry, and men mustering to cheer the Ogpu in Frampton-Cotterell and Yate. If my

resolution needed any further confirmation it must have received it then. Once again the too familiar gulf between England and Bloomsbury yawned beneath my feet. Whatever formal severances it might exact, in spirit, it was clear, a rupture with this bleak international atheism could never be to part from the people of England. Indeed the only danger seemed to be that the people might not know their leaders till too late. Sooner or later they would return to power a Labour Government which they supposed to be like-minded with themselves; and then, while in Winterbourne and Charfield men still congratulated themselves on the prospect of better pensions, more widely flung organisation or a sterner way with profiteers, or perhaps merely of a change, the pundits and the fanatics, the men for whom the core of English politics really did mean hoping for the success of the Russian Five Year Plan, would be gathering in committee rooms at Westminster. And soon in Charfield and Winterbourne they would learn, too late, what they had voted for. Indeed, for the intellectuals, had not the head and forefront of Mr. MacDonald's offending been that as Prime Minister he had failed to identify the lecture-rooms with the voice of England? Or, as Mrs. Webb, I now observed, was just putting it, "MacDonald was always for Reform in general, but when any particular reform was proposed to him, he always found reasons against it."

Not that the issue, of course, was as simple as all that. Issues, unfortunately, very seldom are. If it had been a question only of parting from the intellectuals my hesitations would have lasted less

than sixty seconds. The mischief of it was that this time, for once in a way, the trade unionists were going blind. And, unlike the intellectuals, the trade unions are England. Long trained to fight, after all it was the essence of their being, for concessions in wage and pension, when the crisis broke they had almost automatically resisted the proposal to cut the rates of unemployment insurance to the level which they had themselves acclaimed as proper in 1924. And the majority of a Cabinet which had itself in private already accepted the policy of cuts had lacked the courage to tell the trade union bosses that courage was all they too needed. Yes, breaking with the intellectuals was one thing, and breaking with the trade unions decidedly another. Nevertheless courage is so rare a quality that it is a sound maxim to follow it, when you see it displayed. Hence that thud, symbolic as the slamming of the front door in Ibsen's *Doll's House*, in the pillar box at Camberley. Sooner or later, if I knew them, my friends in Gloucestershire would share my views.

None the less I had no doubts that for me at any-rate, this meant the end of politics. In the two years since that election of 1929, in which we had been beaten by a mere five hundred votes, our seven years of nursing had begun at last to bear a rapid harvest; in those two years alone our membership had doubled. It was distressing to say good-bye to all that, but naturally I could not fight the sitting National member. The prospect of parting from old friends there, Jack Wilkins and Mrs. Tippetts and Councillor Bacon with his thunderous laugh, was more distressing still. Like most of the tasks from

which one shrinks, however, it proved less formidable than in the prospect. We parted in sorrow but wholly without anger. Nobody called me a traitor. Most of my supporters understood, and all seemed to respect, my motives. Scarcely any of our friendships, it proved, were severed. Indeed, even the political severance was often only temporary or nominal, for many of them have voted ever since for the National alliance. For their kindness at a moment which might have left a lifelong soreness I owe them much. But I owe them a good deal more for seven years of education among them, from which I learned as much, I have begun to realise, as from any other experience in my life.

None the less, as I drove thoughtfully home on September the thirteenth, under a fantastic sunset of dappled pink, from the final meeting with my executive, it seemed clear that politics, as far as I was concerned, were done with. I must return to the life wholly literary and cloistered. Perhaps even the time had now arrived for that small grey manor house, remote yet accessible, easy to run yet unmistakably "period," of which we have constantly dreamed but which has somehow never yet quite fitted into the pattern of our lives. I had thought once that, contrary to received tradition, I might be a better historian for knowing something at first hand of how simple men are moved by argument and interest. Well, that lesson, for what, and I thought it much, it had been worth, was ended; could I not become a scholar now, of a more accepted brand? But of what brand? For there are several. Most communities, and the world of scholarship is

no exception, set highest store by the qualities which their members most commonly possess. In Oxford and Cambridge, for example, most Senior residents of the University are learned men, or capable of becoming learned; and on the whole it is learning which is respected most. Rather fewer can teach compellingly; teaching, I should say, ranks next. Fewer still possess the literary graces; and to write so that what is written can be read with pleasure, to write indeed in the vernacular rather than the *argot* of the lecture-room—this is sometimes to be faintly suspect of charlatanry. Fewest of all perhaps can lecture, by which I mean instruct and interest large audiences with the spoken word, as distinct from reading manuscripts aloud in public; and the art, for it is an art, of lecturing ranks lowest of all. I wondered, as the car swung up into the gloaming of the Wiltshire Downs, whether I could school myself into a candidate for that supreme academic rank, of pure learning. Could I select my special, my very special, subject, could I study it all but silently for a quarter of a century, emitting only at long intervals some abstruse pamphlet, some subtly acid critique, and then on the threshold of the grave, publish the little read but supremely authoritative *magnum opus* which would ensure what is called a European reputation, that is to say the respect of a few dozen learned persons in each of a few score Universities? The enterprise seemed as if it would require both exceptional intellect and exceptional self-control. On the whole, I thought, I should have to be content with one of the lower categories. And in any case all the values of the outer world are mysteriously

transmuted in Oxford. Did I not remember the visit of Thomas Hardy? How he descended at the College gates, looking like a frail, bright-eyed old gentleman-farmer, and none the less it had been like welcoming Thackeray or Dickens. But in Provost Magrath's drawing-room, with Hardy sitting on the edge of his chair uneasily rubbing the knees of his trousers, and Magrath (who was older even than Hardy and might or might not have read one of Hardy's novels) beaming at him with benevolent condescension as if he were a nervous freshman, the Oxford atmosphere had got to work and one really almost felt that Magrath was of more consequence than Hardy. Next day when I was escorting him to look for the exact point from which the curve of the High looks loveliest, the academic aura had begun to fade; and by the time we were on Boars Hill dropping in unexpectedly on John Masefield ("Mr. Charles Dickens to see you, sir") he was unmistakably the Great Victorian once more. The fact remained that in Oxford even the unique prestige of Thomas Hardy had been mysteriously transmuted. What a pity too I thought drowsily, as the lights of Reading began to blur the horizon (it was from Crowthorne that I had driven down to that ultimate interview), what a pity that this is a generation, two generations, too late for the crusted old Oxford characters. And I thought of one who had ended about the time that I was an undergraduate, of whom a friend of mine, who had been his scout, had told me many an admiring tale. This old gentleman, irremovable, for his Fellowship dated from before the last Commission but one—was regularly called, and his

bacon and eggs set at one end of the table, at seven in the morning. Regularly at one o'clock my friend must call him again and put bread and cheese and beer at the other end of the table. At one-thirty he would rise, eat both meals and sally forth across Magdalen Bridge. Once over the bridge the round was invariable. Port Mahon, The Cape of Good Hope, a couple of other pubs whose names escape me, and finally a tavern in a passage known then by the sinister soubriquet of the Sot's Hole. In each of these havens the elderly scholar would consume liberal quantities of neat whisky. Between the ports of call, at a stationer's shop, he would purchase *Alley Sloper*, *Comic Cuts* and *Chips*, and any afternoon might be seen, propped insecurely against a wall, shaking with gargantuan laughter over their coloured illustrations, while a jeering mob of children waited to scramble for the papers, which he flung down one by one on the pavement as he finished them. And so back somehow over Magdalen Bridge, half an hour late for dinner, at which, as Senior, it was his business to preside. Only understood with difficulty, owing to a defect of speech, when sober, he was by now of course completely incomprehensible, and it was fortunate that by the time dessert was on the table he was invariably asleep. Yes, there was something surely to be said for an Oxford which had produced Newman, Jowett and this student of *Comic Cuts*. And then there was the old boy who thought he was a toadstool, and every now and then—— But here were the fir-woods again and the cool night air blowing down from Finchampstead Ridges, and with a start I realised that I was letting fantasy run

away with me. We did, however, begin our search for the manor house.

Precisely a fortnight later politics once more extended a beckoning finger and the manor house once more receded. What I had said good-bye to, it now appeared, was the circumference of politics; the whirligig of this dissolvent time was now to fling me to their centre. (Dissolvent, I say, but not, I should like to add, decadent. I have never been one of those who regard these, so apocalyptically, as the last days. Our time does not smell, so to speak, of decadence. Nor have I ever myself expected that long prophesied second world war which is to end civilisation. Extreme pessimism, however, has now and again spread far beyond the intellectual coteries, in which it has long been an article of faith. I remember, on the last day of May in 1932, talking with a colleague at Oxford who expressed the view that within twelve months Oxford, and civilisation, might well be no more, and how I went up to London that afternoon under the dragon-shapes of lowering storm clouds and on a committee Lord Allen of Hurtwood observed that all his conversations that day, and he named a Minister and an ex-Minister, had centred round one subject; was this—the Manchukuo trouble was afoot—the end of civilisation?) The finger beckoned in the shape of a letter from Frank Markham, who was then the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary. Mr. MacDonald's adherents—there was as yet no recognised name for the still formless group—were actually proposing to contest seats at the coming

Election. This was a prospect with which I had not reckoned. As I talked it over with Markham in a smoking-room at the House it seemed almost a rosy prospect. Our new allies, it was supposed, were going to give us a clear run in constituencies held by Labour Members on a minority vote. We even got out a Whitaker and began tentatively selecting constituencies. At dinner afterwards we were unexpectedly joined by the Prime Minister who, as usual, was tired, but in good spirits. He said that he had just told the Press that he could not lead the Conservative Party; the Election must be fought by a National Party with a National Programme. Such was the confusion of those days that this simple statement caused something like a sensation in the Press. We talked constituencies too, and the Prime Minister said that he was not going to announce till the last moment where he was going to fight, himself. It was all curiously dream-like. Leaving, we met Victor Cazalet, waiting for Charlie Chaplin, whom he was to entertain at a dinner-party with Mr. J. H. Thomas and the King of Greece.

Less than a week later I was at breakfast at 10 Downing Street, where Mr. Thomas was giving the Prime Minister, who had been up in Seaham, a spirited description of the prodigious trouncing which Snowden, knowing that this was probably his last speech in the Commons, and discharging the accumulated resentments of who knows how many years, had administered to his late colleagues. This was the celebrated occasion on which he asserted that he had never read *Labour and the Nation*, the Labour Election manifesto of 1929. The Prime Minister and

Mr. Thomas had both received, they said, a stencilled letter from Transport House announcing that the Executive Committee had expelled them from the Party. This mass-produced, but historic document was signed with a rubber stamp and initialed by some unknown subordinate. Thus drably and inconspicuously did the old Labour Party sign its own death warrant. When I got home that afternoon I found a duplicate missive awaiting me.

We believed of course that there were non-vocal millions who would take our path, as soon as they could be got to hear the facts. None the less, lacking organisation, money and even, it might almost be said, a name—the Prime Minister, for his part, announced that at Seaham he was going to fight under the old Labour colours—our small group cannot be said to have entered the great Election with particularly bright prospects. Sometimes as I tread the discreetly carpeted stairs of the almost luxurious building from which nowadays skilled organisers marshal its steadily increasing adherents, I remember with a certain affection the almost nightmare quality of our first improvisations. One day in particular I like to recall. It was the tenth of October, and the Election was upon us. The afternoon before, I had been urged by telegraph to contest constituency A, and in the evening was asked on the telephone what I thought of constituency B. In both there would apparently be Conservative and Liberal opponents, as well as the Labour man. The morning papers of the tenth, as I travelled to town on the early train, still revealed Conservatives fighting their Liberal and Labour

national allies all over the country. The temporary offices, into which our gallant amateur headquarters had just moved, proved to consist of a narrow corridor, in a great block of offices, with three or four small rooms opening off each side of it. At the entrance, and spilling over into the inner corridor itself, surged a mysterious throng. Some would-be candidates and an ex-Member or two I recognised. The energetic gentlemen in overcoats with scribbling pads or cameras were obviously Press. Others again I put down as sympathisers, messengers or just rubbernecks. But even so a good many seemed unaccounted for. Down the corridor itself there was a constant scurrying in and out of the partially furnished rooms which opened off it. Nobody seemed to be sitting at a table, nobody seemed to be sitting down at all. Everybody was hurrying about, or standing in groups, talking. Save that the Prime Minister's confidential Private Secretary, on whose shoulders had fallen the first exigencies of improvisation, sat pale with exhaustion beside a telephone. He had had no sleep for two nights, and his wife was in a nursing home. He hoped, he said, to hear something about Constituency B, or possibly Constituency C, in the course of the day, and, rising wearily, he led me through the rabble of irrelevant office boys and mysterious strangers in the passage to another partially furnished room, in which the Chairman was saying that he couldn't be Chairman unless the Prime Minister publicly denounced the Conservative candidates who were still preparing to oppose National ex-Members, and even National ex-Ministers, from the allied

Parties. This delicate problem we discussed for some time, while telephones rang and unaccountable strangers surged in and out of the room. At one point indeed we were actually evicted, if my memory serves me, by a couple of electricians, passed, still talking, out into the corridor, chose another door at random and continued our conversation in an empty, and, this time, a completely unfurnished room. The upshot of it all was that the chairman, the Private Secretary and I were to drive round to Downing Street, where the chairman would ring up the Prime Minister. As I waited in the corridor for one or other of them to disentangle himself from some other conversation, I timidly pushed open yet another door. The room within was empty, save for a table, on which an exquisite young lady sat swinging her legs and delicately powdering her nose. With a muttered apology I hurriedly withdrew.

## XII

### ORTHODOXIES

THREE years later Stanford and I were travelling up to Durham to speak at a miners' meeting at Seaham. It might mean anything from a riot to a boycott. The country as a whole had settled down by now under the National Government. Only the critical weeklies still regularly, and indeed professionally, prophesied disaster. In these austere columns every Roosevelt Plan, each new mass execution in Holy Russia, the advent of every short-lived administration in France was greeted with ecstasy, or at least respect; only the British Government was always and invariably purblind, only the British people were doomed to irredeemable misery and despair. This was not of course the temper of the people as a whole. The intellectuals still gesticulated from the far side of a great gulf. Nevertheless, if the intellectuals were still spiritually sundered from the nation, so also, if only by its own misfortunes, perhaps was Seaham. Seaham after all was a mining, a "distressed," area. Also it was the Prime Minister's constituency. Anything might happen at Seaham. In the forepart of our train there was singing and shouting. At York we changed for the Durham line and a number of the vocalists detrained too. They proved to be a detachment of "hunger-marchers," going home by rail. They were lusty, decently

dressed young men with mouth-organs and bugles, who sang the Internationale and exchanged cheers with colleagues in the train. It was not long since I had watched the hunger-marchers swinging into Oxford to a lilting marching tune, after a ten-mile hike. I thought then of the men in Kut, falling flat from sheer hunger when they tried to walk a few score yards in the trenches. Near by me stood a Communist undergraduette. She stared at the column, fascinated, her steel spectacles misted with tears. "Starving," she whispered fiercely. "My God! Starving for years!"

We waited in the bare, dusty ante-room with the miner's checkweighman who was to take the chair. It was faintly suggestive of a wait for zero hour in the trenches. Up the little flight of stairs and through the curtain was the hall, packed with miners. It was not going to be a boycott then; would it be a riot? The checkweighman fumbled with his watch. "Time, I think, gentlemen," he said, with a sigh. He squared his shoulders and led the way up the stairs. The audience watched us with curiosity but without enthusiasm as we distributed ourselves among the platform chairs. Stanford spoke first. It was a courageous performance. Choosing the stiffest fence, he talked mostly about the means test. There were several outbursts of shouting, but no organised interruption. They had come to listen, then. Once or twice it looked for a moment as if the meeting was going up in disorder. But always Stanford rode the storm. When they shouted he shouted too, and soon they were listening again. I watched the audience with interest. They were

almost all men. It might have been one of the meetings I remembered so well after a strike pay-out in the Bristol coalfields. I decided that I would do my best not to let them start shouting. And while they were still staring curiously at me because I was a peer, I reminded them that, Europe being what it was, a democratic audience was ill-advised to assassinate free speech. And then I went on to detail the incontestable evidence of the growing prosperity of the mass of the people, incontestable but as yet little known. In housing, in health, in employment, the highwater marks of the past were being overtopped. And why? Because all that was gold in the old Socialist creed—the principle of organisation, of public interest before private profit—survived as the common property now of all political Parties. All that was dross—class-bitterness, anti-patriotism, stereotyped formulas—was dead. So that the national alliance did but mirror the fundamental truth that to-day, as probably, if the truth were known, at most times during the last hundred years, nine-tenths of the politically conscious were broadly agreed upon the domestic policy of the next ten years. Because too, thanks to this fundamental agreement, the national alliance had been able to restore legislative liberty of manoeuvre. Tied to no one traditional dogma, no Ark of the Covenant of any one Party, it chose its weapons where it pleased, interweaving in the pattern of recovery the strands of all the political traditions. But at the roots of that wide discretion lay the fact that Collectivism has become all-pervasive in the intellectual atmosphere of our day. We no longer call it Socialism when a National

Government sets up a Transport Board or nationalises royalties. The true reading of MacDonald's career was that, having first played a chief part in converting the nation to Evolutionary Socialism (as he called this creed) he was now denounced as traitor by sound Party men because he had joined his converts to save the nation by putting his creed into practice. And the consequence of all this is that, whereas ten years ago it looked as if we were faced with a clear-cut choice between a "Capitalist" and a "Socialist" state, to-day nobody but a few doctrinaires supposes that in fact either Scylla or Charybdis lies ahead of us. To-day, vast areas of our economic life are controlled by Boards and Commissions, whose underlying principle is scarcely any longer a subject of dispute. This is neither Socialism on the international model nor Capitalism on the international model. It is British compromise; a courageous substitute for both; an attempt to enjoy the best of both worlds; a democratic answer to the rigid formulæ of the totalitarian states. In time to come it may well be as widely acclaimed and imitated as was British Parliamentarism a century ago. The audience actually listened for half an hour without an interruption. At the end there was even applause. As they streamed out, I did not suppose that there were many formal converts among them. The magic of the Party label would be potent for some while yet. What I had been saying to them they would usually prefer to hear said with different emphasis and in another tone of voice. The fact remained that fundamentally they agreed. Even here, where politics were naturally at their bitterest, no un-

bridgeable gulf divided us. If my politics were orthodox, so, in the last analysis, were theirs.

I could not help feeling that in some ways it was rather a pity that we were at the Silver Jubilee service in St. Paul's. Or rather it was regrettable that we could not at one and the same time be in St. Paul's and in the streets. The service in the cathedral was memorable, but the ritual of the streets, at least equally religious after its fashion, would surely be more memorable still. However, there was the drive to the cathedral down the route itself, thronged and sunlit, where the early fainting cases were already being carried off by the ambulance men. Already over the excited crowds hovered the distinctive aura of the day, compounded of a simple emotion, a sense of unity in diversity and a good humour which could hardly then have been found anywhere else in the world in similar combination. When the service was over at St. Paul's my wife performed one of her more brilliant strokes. A slow, single file of equipages, it appeared, was to pick up the huge congregation at the west door. And as, when a car eventually drew up to the steps, its owners might well be wedged hopelessly out of earshot in the throng, it was obvious that this would be a lengthy and formidable proceeding. Great strategy, we are told, is always simple, and all that we did was to slip, court dress and all, through a few hundred yards of crowded street, have our own car extracted from its resting place and start away. After a moment of doubt, a policeman, thankful perhaps to see anything on the move, waved us on with a vague gesture of

benediction. In street after street, as we passed, the crowd was just breaking up after the transit of the Procession itself. Nothing else on wheels was visible; only flags, torn paper fluttering on the pavements and an immense sea of humanity. It seemed almost incredible that so many people could be at once so excited and so well behaved. After a detour—a vast throng made Trafalgar Square impassable—we reached 10 Downing Street, where we were to meet the children (they had been watching in the Mall), only ten minutes later than the Prime Minister himself—who had driven in the Procession to the Mall and thence across the Horse Guards' Parade in a private car. It occurs to me now that perhaps we were rather naughty; there were those who waited their three hours at St. Paul's. All the same, on that possibly somewhat irregular journey we received a vivid impression of the soul of a people, more vivid even than from the surge round the floodlights of the Palace in the evening. Once again the people had showed itself uncannily unlike so many of the depressing portraits of the people. These, however, it was obvious once more, were not so much portraits of the unconscious sitter as self-portraits of the artists by themselves. From the Jubilee onwards can be traced the visible decay of Post-War. For the Jubilee suddenly and pitilessly illuminated the spectacle of a people which had passed into a new era ahead of its intellectual leaders. The nation was showing (for all the world to see), what had long been true, that it was afraid neither of its instincts nor of its emotions, nor even of optimism. The intellectuals hated or dreaded all

three. In this profound sense indeed the Jubilee marked the triumph of Democracy. During those Jubilee weeks, when the national temper displayed itself so naked and unashamed that not even they could fail to notice it, the coteries were ill at ease. They looked, and doubtless felt, extremely un-Jubilee. A captivating anthology might be compiled of the utterances of their pundits at this time. I restrict myself to one, in its poignant simplicity, its unconscious symbolism, an unmistakable period piece. "The figure," wrote the distinguished columnist of a highly intellectual weekly, describing his impressions of the Jubilee, "which protrudes in my memory is that of a road-cleaner who was kept busy raking the dung left by the horses." In all the sunlit cavalcade, among all the cheering multitudes of common folk, what had most lastingly impressed an intellectual was the gathering of dung.

I had broadcast before, of course. And in the usual way. That is to say, I had written an essay on Victorianism or Public Opinion, as the case might be, and read it, rather self-consciously, into the microphone. It was not very exciting for me or, I imagine, for my unseen audience. Then I did a short series of talks. And gradually it was borne in on me that there must be more in broadcasting than reading an essay into the microphone. After all, had I ever myself been able to listen through a sermon, a lecture or a speech which was *read*? Assuredly I had not. In this strange new medium it must surely be possible to establish a greater intimacy with one's audience than that. I began to

experiment with an altogether different style. The authorities were very kind to me. They gave me a series in the afternoon, when the audience, though far larger no doubt than the public of a best-seller, is nevertheless, by B.B.C. standards, relatively small; and they let me chat about anything I liked. It was not so easy as it sounded. First, I found, you had to be sure that nothing you said was going to be printed. Once you had print at the back of your mind, try as you would to stifle it, your literary conscience was awake, the trail of the serpent was over all. It isn't merely that one doesn't talk as one writes, it isn't merely that one uses other words, other phrases, other rhythms. The difference is far subtler than that. The whole mind is differently keyed. One *talks* about different subjects in a different setting and in a different way. One can be intimate. Oddly enough, though my whole object was informality, I found that I needed a great deal of preparation. There was the question of timing to begin with. That couldn't be left to chance. And I usually found that the first draft of a talk of this kind, or a good deal of it, was dull, pompous or impersonal. Often I wrote two or three and went on altering up till the last moment. But when I got to the microphone I never read my script. It lay there on the table and I followed the lay-out of it very closely. But I put most of the sentences now into my own impromptu words again. It sounds a curiously circuitous method. But I found that in this way I could combine careful selection and shaping with an informality and a sense of intimacy which was continually surprising me. To my

astonishment I could talk to a multitude of invisible strangers about the trivial things I really cared for, as I could hardly have talked to the most intimate of friends. I was allowed, you see, to talk about *anything*. I have never, I believe, said a word on any matter of public controversy. And though at times I must have made it plain that I do not care, let us say, for Crooning or Geometrical Art, I have pretty seldom, I think, dealt with matters of opinion at all. This is contrary to all the canons, according to which you cannot be interesting unless you are controversial, or at least opinionated. But more and more I found myself, as the curious sense of intimacy grew, speaking of the things I really care for. And these are not controversies. Not the great matters about which men are divided in public, but the lesser matters by which in private they are united. To sit by one's own fireside in silence, broken only by the occasional fall of a coal in the fire and the slow ticking of the clock; games with children; the memory of old tunes and of leaves falling through the sunlight of distant autumns; one's family, one's dogs or one's garden; a small boy, long ago, scurrying through the dusk of the apple trees towards the lighted windows of home. And more and more, as I went on, the letters which came to me from listeners steered me themselves into these channels. Just as I could speak intimately to the listeners I had never seen, they found, I think, that they too could write intimately to a disembodied voice. And constantly my unknown correspondents returned, with every variety of individual emphasis, to the same belief, my own; that it is the small

things, the trivial, friendly happenings of home, which give life its value—for our love of them is founded upon the simple verities, which are not of yesterday nor of to-day nor of to-morrow, but for always. This, for example, is a doctor, one of one hundred and six unknown listeners whose letters have reached me in the last forty-eight hours.

*. . . It is the hour when night is closing in, when nerves are fretted and frayed, and there comes a voice. It is as if a friend stole silently and unobtrusively in and took a chair near the fire and began to talk. . . . There is a common bond immediately established and then there follows an easy, simple meandering among the everyday experiences of life, throwing into relief those simple and eternal verities of feeling and experience in all their simple beauty and loveliness and truth. "Still stands our ancient heritage." We sit and the clouds pass as one lovely thing and another is brought back into consciousness by the reminiscences and anticipations and asides of a friend. We are brought back to our base, where there is security and plenty. It is this common touch, this diffusion of a sentiment made communal by its common denominator, this injection into harassed minds of the simplicity of beauty and loveliness which constitutes the power and healing quality of such talks. . . .*

And this is another of this last hundred:

*. . . A few weeks ago I was walking with my husband in one of our country lanes, and it was one of those still days, and every now and again a leaf would fall almost without a sound. I remember saying that I liked a wind when the leaves were falling, they seemed to enjoy the finish so much better. I have always loved nature, it has made me feel richer some way as though I had a share*

*in the universe, and how happy I was when with our son (when he was a little boy) we used to go exploring for the first wild flower, on a sunny day in February. We would take a walk where we knew the lark would be singing, and come back home happy. And of course I told him that the lark we had heard might be a descendant of the lark Shelley heard, you see it made it more thrilling. . . . As the boy grew older I determined if at all possible he should have an education that I would have liked. . . . We were only rather poor but happy, my husband being a good hardworking man, more useful with his hands than reading or studying. At the age of ten the boy won a County Minor Scholarship, but alas, his father was on short time, what had we to do? I pocketed my pride and although I was then thirty-nine and not very robust, I went out to work, doing my housework at nights, and washing on a Saturday, my husband helping as much as he could. I managed that for nearly five years and then had a breakdown and have not been too well since. . . . Now Lord Elton do you see how you have helped me. Sometimes lately I have wondered if I had done right to put knowledge, literature, etc., before money because my husband . . . has only thirty-six shillings a week and health insurance off that. It means me wearing my clothes year after year, although my son gallantly says I always look distinguished, but on listening to your quiet talks it does seem worth while, for it is what we can get within us that really matters. . . .*

I had talked to the writers of these letters more intimately, I think, than I could have written, and they at any rate knew, as readers of this book, I am afraid, may not, what I believed in most. This pile of letters, like its predecessors, comes from every

variety of home. There are old-age pensioners, Lancashire millhands, clergymen, doctors, a countess, the village barber. . . . But each, if he could read the letters of the others, would understand the writers of them. For each knows the worth of those fundamental simplicities which are the final orthodoxy.

There is an unreality, I see now, in this book. There is much controversy in it, and controversy after all is not what I care for most. The things which I care for are the small things, not the things which divide but the things which unite, the things which are common to us all. And if much of this book is combative, it is because the men and the ideas I assail seem to me to have denied and defamed these eternal simplicities. They would have quenched, save that it is unquenchable, the flame in the innermost shrine of life. They represent the lie in the soul. I attack them as a man attacks those who invade his hearth.

The Jubilee crowds were healthily trusting their instincts. The uneasy critics were trying, as always, to be rational. There too I found myself on the side of the people. I have never taken much stock myself in the fashionable illusions in favour of pure reason. Science, which has described how so many things happen, has never yet explained *why* anything happens. For twentieth-century scientist, as for medieval schoolman, *omnia exeunt in mysterium*. Artist, statesman and scientist too, for that matter, work by intuition as much as by reason. No man chooses his career, his friends or

even his coat by pure reason. I have always believed that the saints know more than the philosophers. At its best the national genius has always been intuitive; poetry and political compromise have been its most enduring products. And, unlike the French, we have always preferred impulse to logic and experiment to theory. At this very present we owe our safety to an ingrained habit of grappling with each problem as it confronts us, by the compass of our instinctive sense of political direction, when we might have followed half the nations of the world down the primrose path of *a priori* principles to hunger and civil war.

All my orthodoxies, I see, are intertwined. The basis of democracy is the belief that, on broad moral issues, the instinctive wisdom of the simple in their millions is more likely to be right than any panel of professors that could be assembled. And the supreme testimony to the Christian faith is that down the ages it has satisfied the simple of heart, and satisfies them still. Democracy and Christendom alike aver that *Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them unto babes.*

I believe in the many; but I believe also in the one. Christian morality, it is usually forgotten, is the supreme racial economy of effort. The scientist begins where his predecessor left off; all previous knowledge is at his disposal; he stands on the shoulders of the past. But a man who rejects the traditional Christian ethics may lay waste half a lifetime painfully rediscovering what every previous generation in turn has had to discover for itself, that the world, the flesh and the devil are a tedious dis-

traction from the real business of life. "The right to experiment" in morals is as if every new scientific researcher had to remake the discoveries of Newton afresh for himself. . . . The fixed point of Christian morality is the home, the one among the many. And perhaps, when all is said, it is to that fixed point that all orthodoxies return. Perhaps—and at least that would please the psychologists—the basis of all my beliefs is no system, but the mysterious leading-strings of the past. Perhaps the Arnold tradition mattered chiefly because it taught me what I had learnt already, and all the scintillations of Balliol mattered less than that evening bell which was suddenly all the church bells of my childhood. Perhaps the War was only a leaving home and then, long afterwards, my mother standing in the light of the hall. Perhaps politics was the firelight of my own hearth reflected on the dark waters of humanity. Perhaps all life is only a child scampering through the dusk beneath the apple-trees towards the lighted windows of home.

THE END



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Book No.	221